Horror in Culture & Entertainment

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HORROR HIP HOP

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BEYOND THE BIOGRAPHY

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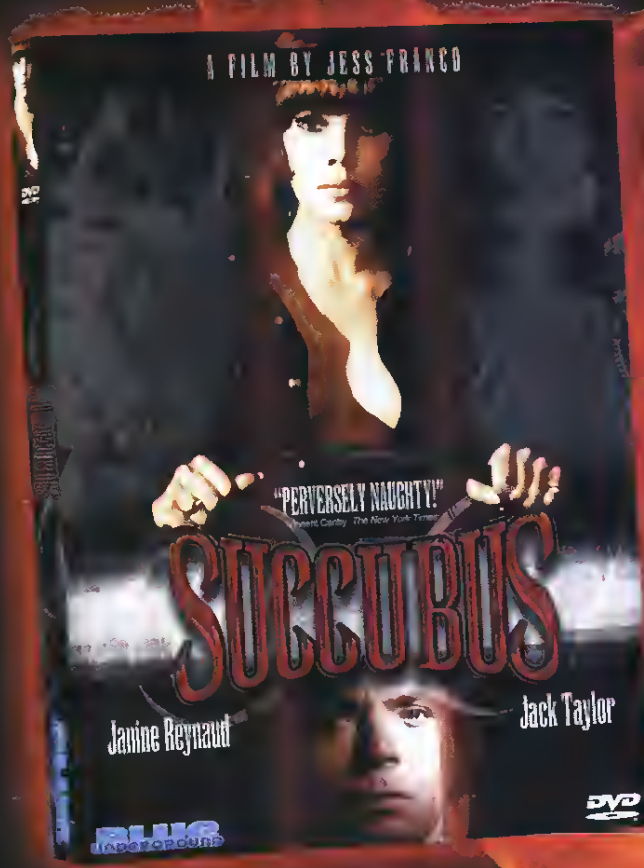
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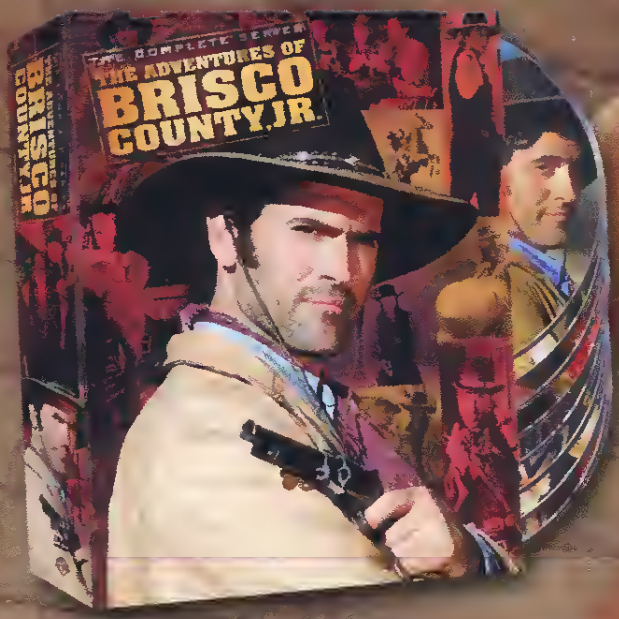
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With Lionsgate finally releasing Neil Marshall's The Descent in North America next month, the British director is set to rejuvenate the long-lost UK horror film. Marshall introduces himself and reveals the reason behind his film's much talked-about altered ending. Plus: The new wave of UK horror, an advance peek at Dog Soldiers: Fresh Meat, and more!
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July 2006 Issue #58

Note From Underground



Back in the summer of 2003, when I accepted the job as Managing Editor here, I took a phone call from a major studio on my first day. We were working on the year's Halloween issue (*RM#35*), and had already decided to celebrate genre legend Richard Matheson on the cover. The woman on the other line (a representative of the studio's marketing department) had an interest in what they could do to "facilitate" their shitheel requisite holiday release slithering its way onto our cover. Of course, I turned them down but not before she gently reminded me that they were buying advertising and several other publications and websites had already taken the bribe, so why shouldn't we?

This is a symptom of a virulent disease that's rampant in entertainment publishing. But at the time I wasn't aware of it and was mildly shocked. Not by the bribery attempt or the threat to pull advertising, but by how easily other publications were pushed over by studio palm-greasing. The truth is, today entertainment journalism, for the most part, translates pretty much to promotion. Publications can and do sell their cover stories and pages sometimes to the highest bidder, and other times, out of fear of pissing off an advertiser or "friend" in the industry.

The latter often puts us in an extremely compromising position, as our responsibilities here at *Rue Morgue* are to you, the reader, not the advertisers, nor the filmmakers. We'll put you before the best filmmakers every issue we print. In other words, we'll always be honest – no matter what we stand to lose, as long as it's not our integrity, and your respect.

The buck-passing, backsliding, yes-man phenomenon that goes on in the movie business is particularly detrimental to the genre because while it graciously fluffs the egos of filmmakers, it really gets us nowhere in the end because it contributes to the production of more bad movies. People are afraid to tell each other that maybe they might have a weak script, or their last film wasn't their best effort, or for whatever reason the movie just didn't jive with them. Horror films get little respect by the mainstream precisely because most of them are garbage. If we can't speak or accept the truth, we can never expect to change any of that.

Because we refuse to be part of this sickness, we've kind of cultivated a reputation for being cynical and hard to please over the years. Fact is, we're not that hard to please. If we didn't believe in anything, we wouldn't have any cover stories, nor a magazine to sell. We much prefer to grace our cover with stories that we feel are worth telling – something like the new wave of UK horror for example – than go the easy route. It's a ton more work for us but, hey, at least it's honest work.

Our job is to tell you what's going on in the horror industry – that's why we're here – but more than that, we're here to analyze what we see and hear. And if what we see and hear is not up to par, we'll say so. Our readers, and most of the filmmakers we sometimes have to criticize have come to admire and respect the fact that we tell it like it is. It's something we're proud of. But once in a while, it gets us into trouble. I've gotten angry phone calls from advertisers, the cold shoulder at industry functions and the silent treatment from people I used to consider friends – all for being honest.

Today, nothing has changed, as yet another major studio rang me up this week in an attempt to weasel its way onto the cover of this very issue. Shall I scrap *The Descent* story in favour of another obvious studio flop? (I'll tell you something, if they need to quite literally SELL me a movie, then they haven't exactly got a gem on their hands.) Needless to say, if you're reading this you know they didn't get what they wanted. But once again, suggestions were made that I might upset the marketing department or, god forbid, piss off the person behind the movie they're pushing. My response, and I couldn't say this with more conviction, is *I don't give a shit*.

I think the fact that I *don't* come from a journalism background is a benefit for *Rue Morgue*. I'm a horror fan, just like anyone else, except I'm in a position to professionally criticize the work of my peers. But one thing I will never do is lie about how I feel or sell out our cover to something I don't believe in. This magazine wouldn't be much good to anyone, myself included, if I did.

JV
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Horror in Culture & Entertainment
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RUE MORGUE #58 would not have been possible without the valuable assistance of: Adrienne Barbeau, Mitch Davis, Mary-Beth Hollyer, and Al McMullan.

COVER: THE DESCENT
DESIGNED BY GARY PULLIN

Rue Morgue Magazine is published monthly (with the exception of February) and accepts no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, photos, art or other materials. Freelance submissions accompanied by S.A.S.E. will be seriously considered and, if necessary, returned.

Canada

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Canada Magazine Fund, toward our editorial costs.
RUE MORGUE Magazine #58 ISSN 1481 – 1103
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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

I HAVE TO COMMENT on the editorial in *RM#57*. First off, I'm not offended per se, even though I'm a Christian, but I think a couple of the statements made were kind of odd. One is that the need was felt to attack Christianity at all, even in the most subtle of ways (looking at your own lack of faith as a supposed "shortcoming", yet calling the reasoning behind such faith "mad"). I didn't expect such a judgement from one of my favourite magazines, especially a mag covering a genre that is attacked so often by people who "just don't understand." The statement of fact that Revelation is a work of fiction was also out of place to me. There's no way to absolutely know that, other than your own perceptions and judgement. Some scholars (not crazy people, historians and people who study scripture for a living) believe Revelation to be a series of symbolic prophecies, and not literal events. This may well be true. Or it may not. But to make a sweeping statement such as "This is fiction" seems a bit presumptuous and even cocky, since it can only truly be an opinion. In your defense, it is an editorial, and as such you have the right to say whatever you feel, and I respect that. It was a good editorial nonetheless, the point you were going for was well made.

Pete Parker – Flint, Michigan

ONE OF THE SECTIONS I always read first is Post Mortem, which I have noticed – since the new editor – is a self-gratifying masturbation piece. What happened to horror nerds bitching about someone else's comment in the last issue? What happened to calling out walking penises like Rob Zombie and what happened to annoying Christians and parents writing in about finding a copy in little Timmy's room with the pages stuck together? *Rue Morgue* is by far the best horror mag on the market, so please stop congratulating yourselves and post some real mortem.

Adam Thornton – Los Angeles, California

The reason we haven't run a lot of critical letters is because, frankly, we haven't been getting them. But we encourage our readers to challenge us, so I'm glad you wrote in. – Ed

I THOROUGHLY ENJOYED your coverage of the original *Omen* films in *RM#57* but I'd like to make a small correction. Robert Foxworth played the industrialist who guides teenaged Damien Thorn toward his demonic future in *Damien: Omen II*, not *Brady Bunch* star Robert Reed, as stated in John W. Bowen's piece. The mistake is understandable, as the actors resembled each other. Foxworth may be remembered by genre fans for his portrayal of the android Questor in the Gene Roddenberry pilot *The Questor Tapes*.

Greg Lamberson – Cheektowaga, New York

I WANTED TO WRITE and say how much I enjoyed the editorial in *RM#56*. It reminded me of being young and first getting into horror. I remember feeling brave and rebellious making it through a notorious horror title. You were a warrior and each title was another conquest. There were those missions you put off embarking on for a bit because of their notoriety, titles such as *Zombie* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, but when you finally did, another door was opened for you in the horror world. I too miss the days of being creeped out by a Saturday afternoon presentation of *The Children* on TV or being worried that I would see Jason's face in my bedroom windows if I looked after watching *Friday the 13th Part III*. I think a lot of what makes us diehard horror fans later in life is the cherished memories of how they affected us in childhood and the power they held. We all hope to find that film again someday that will haunt us and make us run to the front door when we arrive home in the dark.

Nick Lombardo – West Chester, Pennsylvania

IT'S ALWAYS an extreme pleasure to read a new issue of *Rue Morgue Magazine*, the best horror magazine in the world, period. Before I found *RM*, I used to be an avid reader of the other publication, but everything changed since I laid my eyes on my first *RM* issue about three years ago. It's an endless source of information on all of my favourite horror subjects: movies, books, music, etc. (especially films). Special thanks for the article about *From Beyond*, and its director Stuart Gordon, and I would also like to congratulate you on your fabulous artwork. I have one little petition to humbly ask from you, since I was born in Chile, a small and remote country in South America, I would truly appreciate if you guys would do an article or provide some coverage on the outstanding works by Chilean horror directors: Alexander Witt, Jorge Olguin, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Ricardo Harrington and Coke Hidalgo. Chile is a blooming horror cradle just waiting to be discovered.

Max Allende – address withheld

You can definitely count on seeing more on those directors in upcoming issues of Rue Morgue. – Ed

I AM THRILLED with Paul Corupe's article on my DVD, *Monster Kid Home Movies*, in *RM#56*. The graphics are outstanding and I love the sidebar on the right with the capsule descriptions of some of the outstanding titles. I was contacted by the producer of Mancow Muller's morning radio show on WKQX-FM in Chicago and they want to have me on the show to talk about *MKHM*. He mentioned that he saw the article in *Rue Morgue*. Thanks for helping to make this happen.

Joe Busam – address withheld

RE: *RM#56*: Darren Lynn Bousman claims that *Wichita* will push the boundaries over *Saw II*? I thought I saw everything in *Saw II*! I can see how a movie like *Saw* inspired other films such as *Hostel*, *Wolf Creek*, and *The Hills Have Eyes*. The *Saw* movies are just plain terrifying, you don't want to look, but you do. If *Wichita* truly is based on fact, you really have my curiosity up.

Robert Crain – Paradise, California

Correction: Last issue we incorrectly identified the publisher of Ray Garton's *The Loveliest Dead*, the actual publisher is Leisure Books.

Special thanks to Lee Fearnside for her photo contributions to the "Lovecraft's Providence" Travelogue of Terror (*RM#56*) article.

We encourage readers to send their comments via mail or e-mail. Letters may be edited for length and/or content. Please send to info@rue-morgue.com or:

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Dreadlines

News Highlights Horror Happenings

New King television anthology follows in footsteps of *Masters of Horror*

After the success of *Masters of Horror*, it's no surprise the hour-long anthology format is surfacing elsewhere on television. This time, however, all of the source material mines a singular creative well: Stephen King. The first of eight hour-long episodes based on the short works of the prolific writer will premiere uninterrupted on July 12 at 9pm on TNT. *Nightmares & Dreamscapes. From the Stories of Stephen King* adapts tales from a variety of King collections including 1993's *Nightmares and Dreamscapes*, 2002's *Everything's Eventual*, and 1978's *Nightshift*. Spanning four weeks, each episode features a King-familiar lineup of television producers, actors, writers and directors.

"The idea was actually generated by Bill Haber who is the executive producer and Michael Wright who is the head of TNT," producer Jeff Hayes explains. "We had done a four-hour remake about three years ago on TNT of *Salem's Lot* that rated very well and Stephen King fans liked it a lot and that kind of gave influence to Michael Wright thinking that another King project could be a good idea."

Because King's short story catalogue boasts close to 200 titles, Hayes says the difficulty in creating the series was in going through them and finding titles with available rights, while also picking ones that would translate well from page to screen.

"Eight of the most adaptable, interesting King stories that are character-driven were picked," he says. "If you take a look at King's work, there's the horror side of things, there are also the twist-and-turn stories that are very offbeat in nature, and the straight dramatic pieces. We have all of those."

According to Hayes, each installment is a stand-alone piece with a different feel, look and point of view. The first episode to air is *Umney's Last Case*, starring William H. Macy (*Fargo*). Ron Livingston (*King of the Ants*) and Henry Thomas (who starred in Mick Garris' *Masters of Horror* episode *Chocolate*) star in *The End of the Whole Mess*. Other episodes include *The Fifth Quarter* (a *Shawshank Redemption*-like story starring *May*'s Jeremy Sisto), *Autopsy Room Four* (starring *Night Gallery*'s Richard Thomas), *Crouch End*, *Battleground* (starring William Hurt, written by genre legend Richard Matheson), *You Know They Got a Hell of a Band* (starring Steven Weber) and *The Road Virus Heads North*.

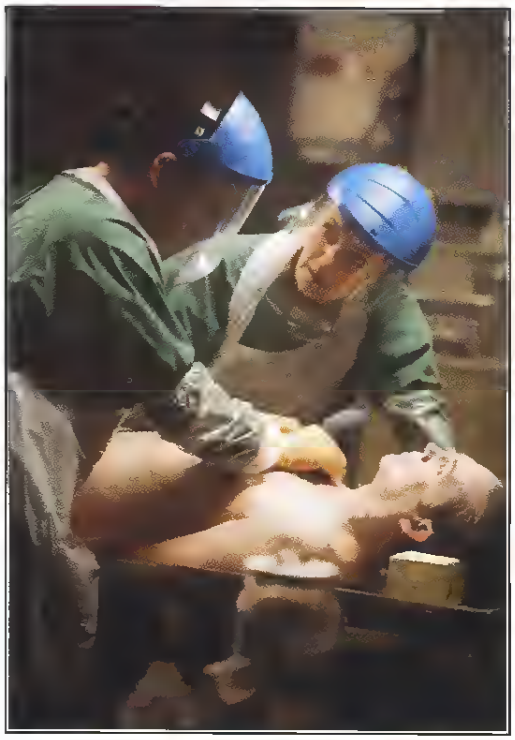
Much of the talent that TNT has teamed up with for *Nightmares* had previously worked with King material; this is the fourth King project for actor Steven Weber and writer Larry Cohen (*The Tommyknockers*, *Carrie*), and Henry Thomas's second. Hayes also paired up again with *Salem's Lot* writer Peter Filardi, director Mikael Salomon (who directs two episodes) and actress Samantha Mathis.

For Filardi, who wrote the episode *The Road Virus Heads North*, adapting the short story into a full-hour episode posed a unique challenge.

"I picked that one to adapt because, while some of the stories are more dramatic, I thought that it would be fun to do one that was pretty straight-up scary," Filardi says. "But I felt like half the story had to be expanded to fill an hour dynamically. It has its challenge really, to do that and retain the intent of the story." Filardi, who's already seen two of the episodes, says that viewers are in for a large cross-section of King's storytelling.

"I think it'll definitely open viewers to the many aspects and faces of Stephen King. The pieces are dramatic – some have romance, but some have more traditional scares – the scary that we expect from him."

Nicole Roberge



Nightmares & Dreamscapes: *Richard Thomas stars in the episode Autopsy Room Four.*



Award-winning filmmaker collaborates with *Ginger Snaps* creator on claymation series

Dreadlines

With the hockey season over, the CBC has welcomed another group of mush-faced performers to its roster with *What It's Like Being Alone*, a thirteen-part, half-hour claymation series debuting this month on prime time. Featuring a cast of orphaned freaks in a world similar to the dark fantasy realms of Edward Gorey and Tim Burton, the show is the brainchild of Brad Peyton, a Newfoundland-born filmmaker best known for his award-winning 2002 short *Evelyn, The Cutest Evil Dead Girl* (the tale of a hopelessly romantic undead girl looking for love in all the wrong places), and is co-written by *Ginger Snaps* screenwriter Karen Walton.

"I'm obsessed with flaws," explains Peyton. "I'm obsessed with fear. Some of my best friends would be called freaks or abnormal, and those are the people that I often find the most inspiring. With this show, I wanted to express the idea that even if you were a freak orphan trying to get adopted and you felt totally alone, you're not. You're surrounded by others. On some level, I think all these characters are all bits of my subconscious talking, but I'm not sure I should think about that."



What It's Like Being Alone: *The freakish orphans in Brad Peyton's stop-motion animated series.*

The story features Princess Lucy, a screeching, chubby little mutant who wears a pink dress and barfs up flying pigs. One fateful day she inexplicably falls from the sky only to land at the doorstep of a dilapidated mansion which she believes to be the castle where her royal parents reside. To her profound shock and bewilderment, she's forced to confront the terrible truth that, in actuality, she has arrived at none other than the infamous Gurney Orphanage, home of a battalion of unfortunate and discarded freak kids beyond hope for adoption.

Nanny Goodapple is the peach schnapps-swilling matron who presides over the ungodly pack which includes such colourful and lovable monstrosities as a violin-playing cyclopean mute, a knife-wielding paranoid-delusional fishboy and an umbrella-toting goth girl who pulls no punches when setting the record straight for Princess Lucy. "Face it," she says. "You've been abandoned by a harsh and uncaring world where celebrity is considered a talent and true genius ends up in a bargain bin."

As delightful and dream-like as it is to watch, stop-motion animation is a notoriously painstaking process, and although Peyton had some previous experience with the technique in music videos, it didn't prepare him for the extremely detail-oriented and time-consuming process.

"To keep a TV show schedule on our budget was difficult, and we faced technical challenges every day," he admits. "But I was surrounded by innovative people who constantly strived to make it work. Honestly, for me the most difficult thing was waiting four hours for a five-second shot! And not being able to do second takes! That was a bit insane."

The series is the first of a number of high-profile, collaborative projects for Peyton and Walton. They're currently working on the script for an animated feature to be directed by Peyton and produced by Tom Hanks' production company, Playtone, entitled *The Spider and the Fly*. They're also collaborating on a script in development at Sony Pictures called *Billy Grimm*, a romantic comedy about the world's worst Grim Reaper.

"He's born with a heart and that makes him kinda crappy at his job," explains Peyton.

What It's Like Being Alone is currently airing on CBC Television in Canada on Monday nights at 9:30PM. At press time, no deal has been signed with an American broadcaster. For more information, visit the show's official website: beingalone.com.

Stuart Andrews



Dreadlines

ROADKILL

FROM THE INFO HIGHWAY

www.thehumanmarvels.com
Like J. Tithonus Pednaud, few can resist the curious wonders of the freakshow. To this end, Pednaud has used his fascination with human oddities to construct a beautifully-rendered blog-style website filled with a compelling history of sideshow performers. Not to be missed.

www.queerhorror.com
Queer Horror explores this oft-overlooked subgenre in all its forms from film to print, each section provides a detailed overview and list of relevant titles for reading/viewing. The site also houses numerous short stories and related interviews for those interested in exploring the movement further.

www.acaseofcuriosities.com
Though fine art and taxidermy may appear to make for strange bedfellows, A Case of Curiosities proves this largely untrue with their Victorian and Edwardian curiosity cabinet restorations. Additionally, the site boasts a history of taxidermy as art, dating back several centuries.

www.hammerfilms.com
The official home of Hammer Films relaunched in April 2006 with press releases, feature stories, info on classic studio titles and brand-new merch. Make this your one-stop scare shop for old-school Hammer horror and its 21st century reincarnation.

www.lasthalfofdarkness.com
An online throwback to those early text-and-graphic, point-and-click video games, Last Half of Darkness beckons users to attempt to solve the mystery of an eerie, corpse-ridden, abandoned house. Do you dare?



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Compiled by Monica S. Kuebler
Got a Roadkill suggestion?
E-mail a link to: **roadkill@rue-morgue.com**

Zombie Fest gathers the undead faithful in England

Were he an actual member of the legions of the walking dead, "Zombie Ed" Thurlow would definitely belong to the latter-day fast-moving subspecies, given the amount of undead-related activity currently on his plate. In fact, they might even have to coin a new category for him: Zombie Renaissance Man.

Thurlow is one of the founders of Terror4Fun, a three-year-old outfit based in Leicester, England that caters to horror fans with events that present bloody thrills in live-action role-playing settings. Thurlow had previously run murder mystery weekends and been involved in plot writing for cyberpunk, fantasy and vampire events but a zombie event had always been his main ambition.

"[I want] to cut to the core of the horror experience," Thurlow explains of Zombie Fest. "Watching films, reading books and playing games can be fearful, but I'd like to provide a way to actually immerse yourself in a complete event where the terror is tangible, with people experiencing and enjoying the fear without the option of simply being able to press pause on a remote control."

The popularity of the event spawned a website, Terror4fun.com, where Thurlow spreads the word about his gatherings and shares zombie makeup tips, film reviews and fan-submitted zombie artwork with more than 5,000 visitors a month.

Thurlow is currently ramping up for Zombie Fest 2006, the third installment of his increasingly celebrated event, which has grown from an assembly of like-minded weirdoes in campy garb playing Twilight Creations' *Zombies!!!* games, to a full-on, weekend-long convention complete with screenings and celebrity guests.

"The previous two were simply based around the interactive and immersive 'zombie game', a kind of last-man-standing, bloodsoaked game of tag with actors, sets, props and costumes," Thurlow says. "But this time we have Stuart Conran, prosthetic makeup artist for films like Peter Jackson's *Braindead* [*Dead Alive*], *Hellraiser*, *Shaun of the Dead* and *The Descent* doing a demo on zombie makeup, and we are supplying enough materials for everyone to get involved and zombify their nearest and dearest. We also have films on a proper cinema screen, a zombie catwalk competition, a marketplace, and a whole host of other activities all based around my most favourite form of the undead."

Thurlow expects about 100 participants for the weekend, which should lend scope to the live-action, role-playing activities he calls The Zombie Annihilation Games.

"The zombie genre lends itself perfectly to this type of event," he notes, "as the people involved get infected, they get made up and then join the ranks of the living dead. . .the way we run these events, there is a very slim chance of people surviving using a little of their wits, some good luck and usually a great deal of running away."

Aside from a weekend centred around role-playing, Thurlow seems to have his sights set on becoming a British zombie impresario. Currently he's working on a film project called *Zombie Undead*, designing props and makeup and shooting a trailer for the film, which is set to go into production this fall. Thurlow is also busy coordinating a zombie film festival in the Leicester area for Halloween. All the while he plans to keep the Terror4Fun site updated as something of a public service to zombie addicts.

"We want to continue raising the standard of zombie films across the world, which was the original idea of creating a website," he says. "We have a section on the front page where people wanting to make a zombie film can have links posted for help and support."

Zombie Fest 2006 commences on Friday, July 28 at the Cosgrove Campsite near Milton Keynes, UK. For a detailed itinerary and other info, visit terror4fun.com.

Scott Lingley



"Zombie Ed" Thurlow



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THE CORONER'S REPORT 13

Weird Stats Morbid Facts

✝ Following the execution of convicted murderer William Corder in 1828, the skin was flayed from his corpse and sold to the public as "souvenirs."

✝ Steven Spielberg displays the model house used in *Poltergeist* on a grand piano in his office.

✝ To this day, as a result of the Civil War, more US soldiers have died in the state of Virginia than anywhere else on earth.

✝ When R.L. Stine began writing his *Fear Street* and *Goosebumps* series, they were originally intended for young girls.

✝ The word "undertaker" did not come into use until 1698.

✝ Despite having two decades of experience in the movie business, the first Canadian production that Ontario-born actor Christopher Plummer appeared in was the low-budget horror movie *The Pyx*, in 1973.

✝ Until the 16th century, any woman convicted of infanticide in Germany was sentenced to death by drowning. This punishment was meted out by executioners who would hold the women underwater using only a long pole.

✝ Due to *Zombi 2*'s ultra-low budget, many of the zombie extras were in fact drunks and itinerant people.

✝ During the French Revolution it was not unusual for graveyards to be dug up, any lead coffins found would then be melted down and fashioned into bullets for use in battle.

✝ Renowned composer Bernard Herrmann (*Psycho*, *It's Alive*) died the night after he finished scoring Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, but his music has been used in an additional 51 films, and counting, since his death.

✝ Humans can only survive approximately ten days without sleep.

✝ In 1935 Romanian authorities banned Mickey Mouse, citing their concerns that the character may frighten children.

✝ The candelabras used in old-time funeral processions were called "herses". This word later evolved into the modern word "hearse" which, of course, is a cart or car used to transport the dead.

Compiled by **Monica S. Kuebler**
Got a weird stat or morbid fact?
Send it through to info@rue-morgue.com

The Rue Morgue SICK TOP SIX

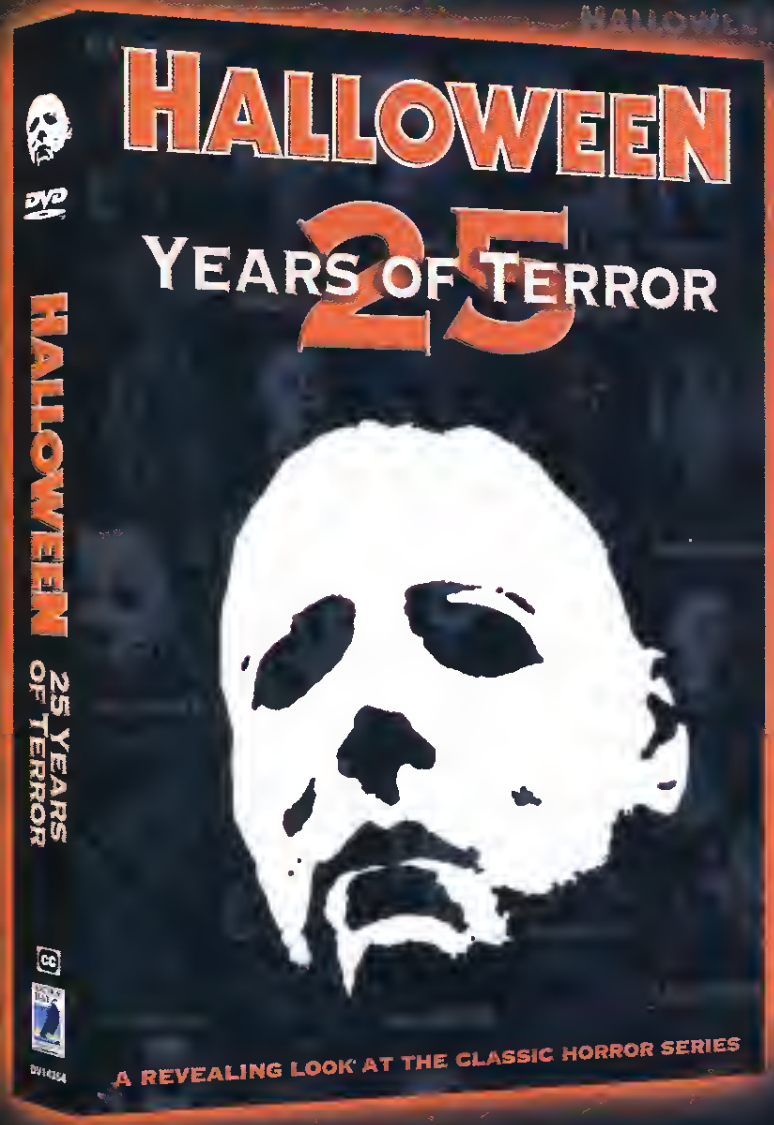
Instances of DIGITAL DESTRUCTION



1. *Land of the Dead*
 Found finger food
2. *Imprint*
 Call girl cuticle cruelty
3. *Suicide Club*
 Somnambulist cutting-board butchery
4. *The Burning*
 Garden shear grip snip
5. *Children of the Corn*
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6. *A Nightmare on Elm Street*
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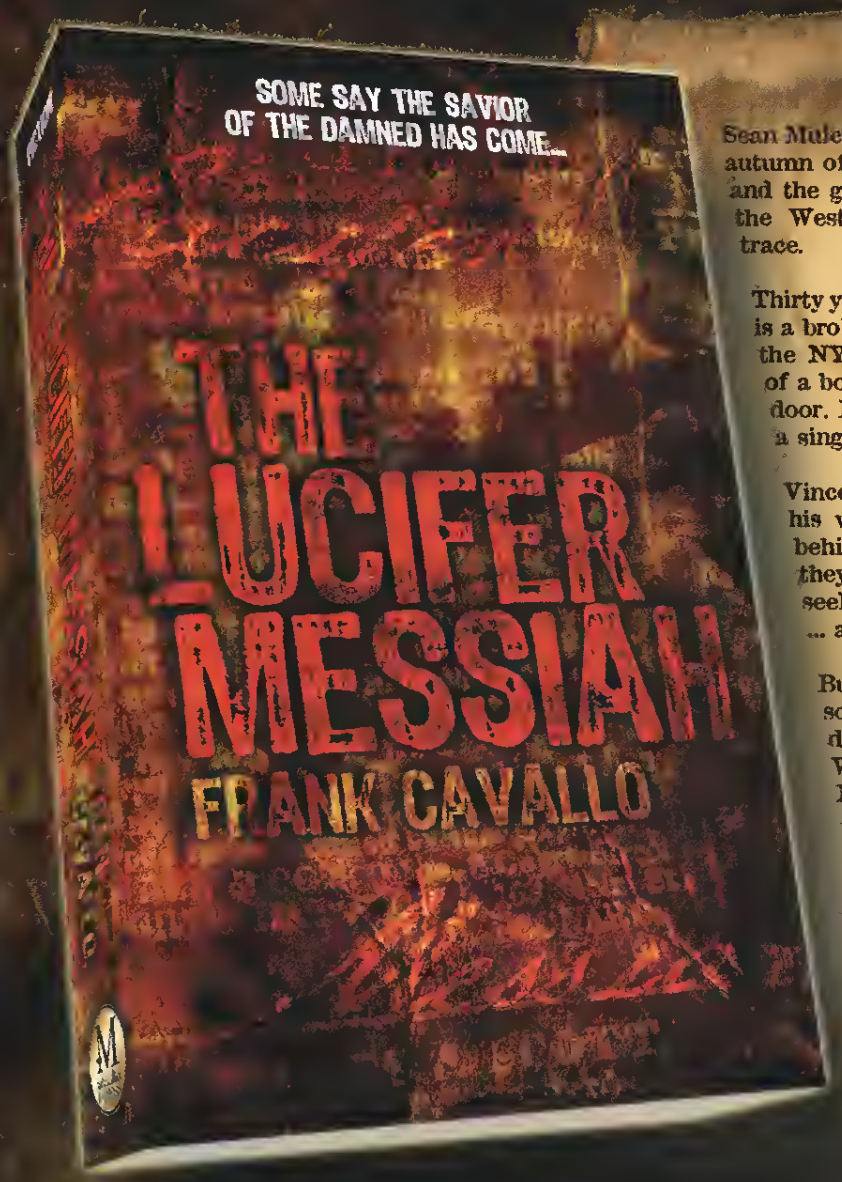
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LAST YEAR, HORROR-STARVED UK AUDIENCES REJOICED WHEN ENGLISH DIRECTOR NEIL MARSHALL UNLEASHED HIS SUBTERRANEAN SURVIVALIST VEHICLE, *THE DESCENT*. NOW NORTH AMERICA WILL FINALLY SEE WHY MARSHALL IS CREDITED WITH REVIVING THE LONG-LOST BRITISH HORROR FILM.

PITCH BLACK PANIC

by DAVE ALEXANDER

Hammer may cast a long, gilded shadow over British horror cinema, but the studio's heyday is long gone, and quite frankly, the English genre film needs a swiff kick in the ass to get back in the game. The man wearing the steel-toed boots and grinning like a soccer hooligan is 37-year-old Neil Marshall, a filmmaker credited with single-handedly reviving English horror, in part because of his 2002 werewolf feature debut *Dog Soldiers*, but mostly because of his second effort, *The Descent*, a subterranean survivalist horror film which finally opens across the pond next month from Lionsgate Films.

It's not that Marshall is the only one making horror films in the UK today (see sidebar p.20), rather, it's that he's the only one taking the genre, in its purest form, to the masses. The director wrote the script for *The Descent* from his own original concept, and it's hard horror – gory, terrifying and dead serious – at its slickest and sickest. This isn't a horror/comedy hybrid riff on Romero like Simon Pegg and Edgar Wright's *Shaun of the Dead*, a low-budget nouveau video nasty splatter comedy like Jake West's *Evil Aliens*, or a refurbished take on a familiar subgenre like Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*, and despite its lack of concessions to mainstream narrative

"WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE PITCH BLACK, IT'S LIKE NOTHING YOU'VE EVER SEEN BEFORE." NEIL MARSHALL

demands – no romantic subplots or marquee stars here – *The Descent* found a much bigger audience than recent under-the-radar original British horror entries like *The Bunker* (by Rob Green, who's directing the sequel to *Dog Soldiers*, see p.21), after it premiered at the Dead By Dawn Horror Film Festival in Scotland last year.

With overwhelmingly positive reviews at home, a wide North American release planned, and a sequel in the works, *The Descent* is a bona fide British hit. And while the cinematography, editing, special effects, performances and haunting Carpenteresque score (see sidebar, p.18) are all bang-on, it's Marshall's knack for storytelling that succeeds above all else.

The film begins with a group of friends fresh off a whitewater rafting trip in Scotland. A tragic car accident on the way home leaves Sarah (Shauna McDonald) without a husband or daughter. A year later she reunites with an all-female group in the backwoods of the Appalachian Mountains to go caving and find some peace. Spearheaded by Sarah's best friend Juno (Natalie Jackson Mendoza), the trip takes the six women deep underground, where they find a series of connected caverns. When a cave-in blocks their way out and they realize no one's coming for them, they're forced to go deeper into the rock maze, where they discover that something horrible and predatory awaits.

Trapped, hunted, running out of equipment and hobbled by injuries, the desperate group begins to turn on one another, as Sarah fights to stay lucid in the impenetrable blackness. Unlike so many other horror films that lose their way in shock scares, special effects and visceral atrocities, *The Descent* lives up to the double meaning of its title by making the journey into madness every bit as central to the story as the literal journey into the bowels of the backwoods.

The Descent is the horror genre firing on all cylinders – a rich, intelligent, white-knuckle terror tale. With shades of *Deliverance*, *The Shining*, and *Alien*, it has more than enough tension and blood-splattered action to anchor audiences beyond those in the genre fan pool. Simply put, it's a classic in the making, one that's good enough, original enough *and* accessible enough to relight the British horror torch – dusty satin capes be damned.

As Neil Marshall begins his own ascent into the horror hierarchy, *Rue Morgue* gets him on the phone from his home in England so he can give us a proper introduction, talk about his upcoming projects and dive deep into the horrors of *The Descent* – including the film's much talked-about altered ending for the North American market.

How'd the horror seed get planted?

As I remember, it all started by staying up late and watching horror films with my dad on TV. The first one that stuck in my mind was *Frankenstein* with Boris Karloff, and the [other] James Whale classics. These movies just entranced me completely, I love the Gothic, dark nature of them, and I was terrified. [And] *Dr. Who* on TV, I was a huge fan of that – anything with scary monsters, anything that was gonna make me hide from the TV and watch from behind the sofa. … The advent of home video in the UK was 'round about 1980, '81, and some of the first things to come out were horror films, at least that was the first thing I got hold of. I watched *The Howling*, *An American Werewolf in London*, *The Thing* – when they came out for the first time. It was brilliant. So I think I got a really healthy appetite from there.

How old were you when you started making films?

I first started making films on Super-8, when I was thirteen, fourteen. They weren't really horror films, I was more into remaking *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, basically. Having been hugely inspired by that I wanted to make my own adventure movies. Only when I went to film school did I return to horror and think well, y'know, this is what I like doing, I





Deep down trauma: *Juno (Natalie Jackson Medoza) fights a subterranean crawler.*

like scaring people. I made a short animated film that involved an eyeball melting and running down somebody's face, and we screened that for the rest of the college, and there was this kind of gasp because people were repulsed by the image that I put onscreen. That really affected me; I thought, "This is great! You get audible reactions from the audience." So my final film, which I did in '92, was a zombie horror-comedy called *Brain Death*, which was about twenty minutes long and full of action and violence and guts and didn't take itself at all seriously, and I think that's what worked for it because it was made on such a tiny budget; it was cheap and cheerful, really. I graduated my Arts program with that, and then I went on to be an editor for a few years but my passion for horror remained, bubbling underneath the surface, and so it seemed only a natural progression that when I came to write my first feature, which was *Dog Soldiers*, that it should be a horror film. That was the way forward for me.

There are definite John Carpenter influences in your films, in both the music, and the group dynamic – which was influenced by the films of Howard Hawks.

Absolutely, more so in *Dog Soldiers* than *Descent*, but there are deliberate Howard Hawks references in there. I'm a huge fan of *Rio Bravo*, *Only Angels Have Wings* and all that kinda stuff, so I packed all that in *Dog Soldiers*. I like that group dynamic, I like the ensemble, I like professionals working with each other. It's a good thing to watch and great thing to make, so I definitely want to carry on that tradition.

What films are reflected in* The Descent *specifically?

Alien, it had a huge affect on me – the way that it was shot, the suspension of disbelief in creating a science fiction world that is totally believable. It was messy and grubby and dirty and wet – I've really latched onto that. Ridley Scott, coming from the same part of England as me, was a huge inspiration and I love his work. *Aliens* really affected me [too]. *The Shining*, the first time I saw that I was only about twelve, thirteen, and that's stayed with me ever since. I love the settings of that film as much as anything. And also performances – the idea of somebody going insane features very heavily in *Descent*. And there are things like *Deliverance*; [director] John Boorman, I love all of his work but *Deliverance* is something that has haunted me ever since I first saw it. It isn't generally categorized as a horror film but it has one of the most horrific scenes of all time. When you see it for the first time, you are absolutely on the edge of your seat, until it cuts to Burt Reynolds with his bow, aiming at the hillbillies, and it's the most conscious feeling of relief I've ever felt watching a film. You just breathe a sigh of relief: "Oh, thank god for that! Someone's coming to save them from this horrendous situation!" All these things kind of compounded and added together, and very much inspired *Descent* because I wanted to make a film that was very true to the kinds of horror movies that I grew up with during the '70s and early '80s, when horror films dared to take themselves very seriously in a way that was gritty and realistic.

Given the not-so-lengthy tradition of all-female spelunking-themed horror films, was there something in particular that sparked the story?

It was just a combination of things. I've read a lot and seen a lot of documentaries about spelunking, photographs of it – never actually done it myself, really. I went down a cave when I was on a school expedition; we went down a mine and I remember for the first time in my life experiencing pitch black. At one point in the trip the guide said, "Everybody stop and stay exactly where you are and switch off all your torches." When you experience pitch black, it's like nothing you've ever seen before. You think you'll be able to wave your hand right in front of your eyes and see it but you can't, and then the guide says, "Oh, by the way, don't any of you wander off because there's like a 200-foot vertical drop right over there." So you're in pitch black, you're absolutely terrified to move, and I think that must've stuck in my mind somewhere. Not consciously, but certainly subconsciously, so the idea of having a movie set underground, in a cave, in pitch black, and then adding in the supernatural element, the group dynamic – all these bits came together one by one and fell into a place like a jigsaw puzzle.

Why go with an all-female cast?

it was actually a friend of mine who suggested doing it with an all-female ensemble cast. Originally I was going to do it as a very mixed group, and someone said, "Why not make it all women?" And I just thought that was a fantastic idea; it was so contemporary, so unusual, and totally realistic. In today's environment women go caving and climbing on a regular basis, so it just seemed very dynamic, very fresh, and I thought I could have a lot of fun with it. What really appealed to me is that it's a film with an all-female ensemble but the story and the plot and everything has nothing to do with the fact that they're women. it would've been exactly the same story had I replaced them all with men. It's not about them being women; that's just who they are.

[Warning: spoilers regarding The Descent*'s new ending appear in the next three questions. – Ed.]*

The final scene of the film, which keeps the story underground, was excised for the North American version. How do you feel about this?

it's not something they're doing against my will, it's something we all agreed on. It was something I actually tried in the edit in the UK when we were putting together the film here. We decided, in the UK at least, to stick to the original script and stick to the original ending, and that's the way it's been released in the UK and right across the world so far, but given the opportunity of reappraising it, we thought, well, let's try it with the other ending that we also tried in the UK and didn't stick with. It's weird, it doesn't make it an optimistic or happier ending, it just makes it ever so slightly different.

But doesn't it place the emphasis more on the physical descent, rather than the psychological one?

I dunno, I think it's more ekin to the ending of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, where, yes, she gets away at the end, but there's no doubt that she's gone completely mental. I don't think that's a happy ending by any stretch of the imagination. If anything, it places the emphasis more on the descent into madness than on the physical descent if she physically gets out of the cave.

Why does it place that emphasis more on the mental descent?

Because we're not dealing with any other external threats – she's out and it's all about her. It's all about what's going on in her head, and it ends with something that's very specifically in her head, but if she's still in the cave, I think the audience is still concemed with the external threats of the cause, so it distracts them from what's going on in her head.

So then why did Lionsgate change it for the North American market?

We played both endings for test audiences [in North America] and the cut version tested a lot better. Make of that what you will.



SOUNDS OF THE UNDERGROUND

Before composer David Julyan ever spoke with director Neil Marshall, or even heard about *The Descent*, he was unwittingly helping the director realize his film. Marshall used Julyan's score for the 2002 remake of *Insomnia* as a temp track on *The Descent* after it was shot, which made perfect sense, as that film's soundtrack helped shape the story from the beginning.



"Neil told me that when he's writing, he'll obsessively listen to scores, and while writing *The Descent* he was listening to *Insomnia* a lot, so in a way we were collaborating before we even met," Julyan explains. When Julyan was eventually offered the job of scoring the movie, he jumped at the chance.

"I was attracted to the originelity of *The Descent*," he says. "This film feels like it has much stronger characterization than a lot of horror. For the main theme I drew on the emotional side of the film, [because] as well as being a horror about e dark claustrophobic place, it also deals with the emotional descent of Sarah."

That theme – an unresolved lullaby – evokes the widowed main character's emotional isolation. But the musician also knew there had to be a perfect merriage between score and effects.

"I always like to try to talk with the sound designers just to find out what they're up to," he notes, "then I'll go off and do my own thing. In this case I was aware that they were creating a cave atmosphere of dripping water etc., and of course the animal-like screams of the crewlers. It's a case of knowing when to leave space in the music for the sound effects."

Although he cites Vangelis (*Blade Runner, Candyman*) as a major influence, *The Descent* also reveals traces of Mark Isham (*The Hitcher, Blade*) via Julyan's use of solo trumpet over a synth-orchestral veneer, and Elliot Goldenthal (*Pet Sematary, Alien 3*) – notably the hurtling brass clusters used for the appearances of the creatures in the film, which are employed as a raw, metallic contrast to Sarah's humanistic theme. Overall, it's e work that solidifies Julyan's position as a major new voice in film composition.

Mark R. Hasan

ADELE HARTLEY, FOUNDER OF DEAD BY DAWN, SCOTLAND'S SINGULAR HORROR FILM FESTIVAL, GIVES US AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE BUILDING WAVE OF UK HORROR.



BRITAIN'S NEW BLOOD

by ADELE HARTLEY

Whatever happened to the British horror film? We used to be pretty good at monsters, half-naked women, occult shenanigans and bloodsoaked camp, thanks to Hammer, who for 25 years, beginning in the late '50s, consistently produced gloriously entertaining horror features and TV shows. While not exclusive to the genre, the studio has become synonymous with genre success in this country and you would think that such a template demanded to be, if not supported and maintained, then at least emulated for evermore. Sadly, our genre scene has been patchy at best since the great Hammer fell.

Since then we've been swamped with turgid cinematic drivel from the US, and yet it took a wonderful British movie like *Dog Soldiers* (2002) six whole years to secure the necessary funding.

"Although *Scream* brought big audiences back into the cinemas to see a bloody horror film, the UK was just incredibly slow to pick up on this," says director Neil Marshall (see cover story), who's generally considered to be the all-around saviour of the great British horror movie. "That's why it took six years to finance *Dog Soldiers*, because the UK industry wasn't remotely interested in handling genre material, least of all horror. What they needed was a good slap, and the likes of *Dog Soldiers* and *28 Days Later* provided that slap."

Maybe they should have been slapped harder because in the wake of Wes Craven's *Scream* (1996), fans had every right to expect the multiplexes to be filled with proper horror films. However, the highlight of the rest of that year was probably Peter Jackson's *The Frighteners*, and in the three years that followed, the immediate legacy of *Scream* proved to be *I Know What You Did Last Summer*. 'Nuff said.

But Marshall is right even if the genre turnaround took its sweet time. And maybe the more interesting year was 2000, when *Ringu* finally found an audience outside Japan. It's also the year that *Versus*, *Ju-On* and *Audition* broke the US stranglehold and lifted Asian cinema from beloved cult status to global phenomenon. In the face of such vibrant alternatives, audiences got less predictable, and when that happens independent cinema surges forward, utilizing industry panic and confusion for good rather than evil. As with any resurgence, the quality varies from films you wouldn't wee on if they were on fire to films that make you get down and kiss the suspiciously sticky cinema floor, grateful to your core that you haven't wasted your entire life in sublimated, slavish devotion to the genre.

Jake West's *Razor Blade Smile* (1998) and joyously silly *Evil Aliens* (2005); Marc Evans' *My Little Eye* (2002) and *Trauma* (2004); Julian Richards' *Darklands* (1996) and *The Last Horror Movie* (2003); Michael J. Bassett's *Deathwatch* (2002) and his new survivalist horror film *Wilderness*; Christopher Smith's *Creep* (2004); Charly Cantor's *Blood* (2000); Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002); Thomas Clay's *The Great Ecstasy of Robert Carmichael* (2005); Nick Hamm's *The Hole* (2001) and, of course, Edgar Wright's *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) -- all identifiably British films and all going to show that for a tiny country, our genre output has been relatively healthy, at least in quantity, over the last ten years.

But what we don't often get right is gutsy, cocky, high-production value fun that doesn't stint on entertainment or gore. Sometimes we're pretty bad onscreen at having fun for the sake of it. Happily, *Dog Soldiers* proved that once in a very full moon, we give the world something to howl about. It was the first time that we had a film that felt geographically identifiable. There's such pleasure to be had from movies that feel culturally accurate, and clearly don't give a toss what the US market will make of them, films like *Nightwatch*, *A Living Hell*, *Calvaire*, *The Eye*, *Haute Tension*, *Occhi Di Cristallo*, *Los Sin Nombre*, *Audition* or *Undead*. Even the very best US

indies are a joy to behold – *Bubba Ho-Tep*, *May*, *Session 9*, *King of the Ants* – but it's a long time to wait since *The Wicker Man* in 1973 to have a British film to add to that kind of list. This hurts twice as much being Scottish, as our entire cinematic identity seems jammed somewhere between *Braveheart* and *Trainspotting*.

"I specifically made *Dog Soldiers* for a mainstream British audience, targeting the jokes, humour and profanity toward people like myself, the audience I know and have grown up with – the Friday/Saturday multiplex crowd," Marshall says of his debut movie. "It seemed like the safest, not to mention the most honest way to play it first time out, rather than trying to second-guess the US audience of whom I have no experience. Try as they might, nobody swears as well as the Brits, and British soldiers have a real flare for the foul-mouthed!"

Four years after *Dog Soldiers* was released, Neil was back with *The Descent*, which achieved the almost unheard of triple whammy of being shot in Britain with British money and a British director. It proved beyond any doubt that the Brits are more than capable of producing an exemplary genre movie.

Today there is more to celebrate than ever, as several indie filmmakers are creeping out of the English bogs with formidable genre movies. Adam Mason is another promising British horror director as you'll discover when you see *Broken* (screening this month at the FanTasia film festival in Montreal, Quebec), simply one of the most astonishingly bleak and cruel independent movies in recent years. Having experienced the nepotistic and staggeringly inept British film industry at its worst, Mason funded the movie himself and has every right to be proud.

"Putting it bluntly, *Broken* was made out of rage," Mason says. "Honestly, writing this now, two years later, I'm getting angry. And that's a good thing because it drives me forward. Every time I see another Film Council sponsored charity case I get so angry I go and write another ten pages. I make another vendetta plan. The best stuff, I guess, is always made in the face of adversity."

Particularly for genre filmmakers, the story is rarely different, and it takes bloody-minded determination to get a completed film out here. On the scene at the moment are *Lie Still* from Sean Hogan who has made a movie that despite its frustratingly predictable storyline has some seriously inventive set pieces and moments of genuine tension. From Ireland come Conor McMahon's *Dead Meat*, Stephen Bradley's *Boy Eats Girl* and Billy O'Brien's *Isolation* (*RM#52*) all worth catching, chock full as they are of their country's language, attitude and humour.

In addition, new studios are popping up. Forty years after Hammer, House of Fear are trying to put horror back into the forefront of the British film industry. House of Fear is a production/distribution company with their own film studio complete with stages, effects departments, editing rooms, dubbing facilities, etc. Their first release is part of a trilogy titled *The Raven*, with episode one entitled Alone In The Dark, starring Steven Craine, Rik Mayall, Norman Wisdom in his last film, Jason Donovan, Robin Askwith, Eileen Daly and Chnstopher Walken, with special effects by Alan Whibley (*The Shining*). The trilogy is written, produced and directed by Richard Oriscoll, and will be available exclusively through their website (house-of-fear.com) in October.

As Marshall notes, it's about time the Brits came back to horror: "I'm sick of seeing US films full of US in-jokes that UK audiences don't get. I'm sick of having their culture rammed down our throats and [I] wanted to turn the tide a little bit. *The Descent* has proved that we *can* make low-budget horror movies in the UK that appeal to an international audience. So, yeah, I guess in the long term that will have an impact on horror filmmaking in the UK, and that can only be a good thing."



Broken: *Adam Mason's ultra low budget survivalist horror promises to be one of the nastiest films to come out of the UK in recent years.*

FRESH MEAT FOR DOG SOLDIERS

While Neil Marshall moves onward to fresh terrain, his first feature has just been green-lit for a sequel. *Dog Soldiers: Fresh Meat* picks up directly where the first film left off, showing concurrent developments that took place off-screen and revealing some crucial information about the title characters.

According to British writer/director Rob Green, the werewolves in *Fresh Meat* are faster, stronger, and, most disturbingly, still retain traces of their SAS training. They're also refreshingly free of the usual angst associated with the werewolf mythos.

"Some of the characters actually love being a werewolf because they are so powerful – the ultimate killing machine; smart, with incredibly fine-tuned senses," says Green, cheerfully adding, "it's a fun spin on the traditional angle that being a werewolf is a curse which damns the person no matter what. We also have a very savage she-wolf in the climax who faces off against the leader of the pack of *Dog Soldiers*."

Green believes that the producers chose him to carry on the series because they were impressed with his last film, *The Bunker* (2001), a low-budget thriller which also mixes war and horror, but isn't nearly as action-oriented as *Dog Soldiers 2*.

After a few delays, *Fresh Meat* is now expected to start shooting this fall.

"We need longer nights for shooting because about 70 percent of the film is set at night," Green explains. "[We want to shoot] during a Hunter's Moon when the moon appears three times its normal size. … We really show the lunar power and the moon's influence on werewolf victims in this film."

As should be evident, the director is a huge fan of the genre, pointing to *American Werewolf in London* and *The Howling* as particular favourites. That said, Green's eager to get his hands on another horror movie tradition. He says that after *Fresh Meat* he's making a vampire flick called *Live Girls*, which offers an unusual take on the bloodsucking mythology and "mixes hard-boiled noir plotting like *Sin City* with hot and sexy lap-dancing vampires."

Tom Murray



Black bloodbath: *Sarah (Shauna MacDonald) becomes trapped deep in the gore-filled lair of* **The Descent***'s subterranean creatures.*

There's going to be a sequel to the film; what's your involvement with it?
I'm not going to be directing it but I am going to be overseeing the project as much as I can. I want to make sure it goes in the right direction. … I came up with the story and I'm just passing that on to some writers now.

Why did you pass on Dog Soldiers 2?
I'm very interested in revisiting the story, but not in the direction that the producers want to go with it, as far as I can tell, so I'm leaving it up to them. … We kind of thought of a concept together and then for whatever reason it just sort of didn't gel, and so they said, "Let's take it in a different direction," and I said, "Oh well, don't worry about it, I'll not bother."

***Tell us about your new project,* Doomsday.**
Once again it's set in Scotland, which quite often my scripts are because I live right on the border of England and Scotland and I'm inspired by the location. It's about a plague that begins to wipe out Scotland, and the creation of a physical barrier across the UK, which divides the country in half. It's an adventure tale about a group of people going into the hot zone. It's very dark, but I wouldn't classify it as a horror film anymore than *Escape From New York*.

Did the success of* The Descent *allow you to work on something with a bigger budget, a project outside of the genre?
Yes, definitely. I don't think I would've been able to do this off the back of *Dog Soldiers*. It wasn't so much that I wanted to get away from horror as it was that I wanted to try something new. I've done two horror films back-to-back. I wanted to try something new but equally as dark; it's gonna be full of action, gratuitous violence and things like that. I'll come back to horror but I've got other genres to explore.

You've mentioned before that you've got several scripts finished. What other sorts of stories are you interested in telling?
A medieval heist movie, which is a post-Arthurian adventure, kind of like an unofficial sequel to *Excalibur* but it's about a bunch of robbers trying to steal Excalibur from a tyrant in the Dark Ages. Another film is called *The Eagle's Nest*, which is kind of like *Die Hard* meets *Remains of the Day* – odd pitch! It's my *Raiders of the Lost Ark*-type movie, World War II action thriller, but it's not actually a war film, it's set during the war.

You've got another horror project written as well, right?
I've been working on a project called *Outpost*, which I've had going for quite a few years now, It's zombies on an oil rig – black comedy/horror in the Pete Jackson kind of mould.

How 'bout a remake? Everyone's doin' one. Are there any horror films you'd want to remake?
I've had a few tentative offers for films that I honestly didn't want to remake because I didn't think they needed to be remade. There's only one film that pops to mind that I'd quite fancy remaking, and that's a James Brolin film from the '70s called *The Car*, which not many people have seen. I think I'd have fun remaking something like that.

You've been credited with reviving British horror. Why was it languishing for so long?
I think right about the time we were trying to get *Dog Soldiers* made there was an inherent snobbery in the British film industry, they really looked down their noses at horror. We found that a lot when I was trying to raise money for *Dog Soldiers*, and so many people said, "It's not our cup of tea, we don't do that kind of thing," and had very much forgotten Britain used to do great horror. It seems to have just slipped their minds somewhere along the way. We just kept on pushing until someone said, "OK, we'll give it a go." At the time, because the horror resurgence was in full flow in the States, and *Scream* had come out, everybody made horror films, and we were just slow to pick up on it. Only now, over the past three years, is it getting easier to fund a horror movie. We're finally seeing the potential. It took awhile but we got there in the end.



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Rue Morgue traces the evolution of a dark hip-hip movement that takes its cues from the horror genre.

the history of Horrorcore

by Jason Lapeyre

Gruesome violence, demonic imagery and nods to the horror genre are usually the hallmarks of extreme metal, but rap has its own long-standing trend of explicitly evil music. At first, horror and hip hop seem like unlikely bedfellows, horror is theatrical, dramatic, an art form of the strange and fantastic. Genre writers and filmmakers invent grotesque creations that target the fear at the base of your spine. Hip hop, on the other hand, is a documentary art form. Rappers kick street poetry about the things they see every day. Shit is *real*.

Yet horror-themed hip hop exists. Even casual rap fans became aware of it in 1994, when horrorcore had its moment in the spotlight, even if the attention was almost entirely from the shine The Gravediggaz were getting. Most hip-hop heads assumed that the genre dried up soon after, but in fact the earliest versions of explicit horror-themed rap appeared in the '80s, and today dozens of rappers are putting out new (de)compositions. So what's the connection? What made Satan grab the mic? To best answer this, it's important to first define the subgenre.

"Horrorcore is a fictional form of rap music with horror elements," says Kap (a.k.a. Kapitol G from horrorcore group KGP) of killmusick.com, a website devoted to horrorcore music and artists. "If you put rap music and a horror movie in a blender, horrorcore would come out. You could

say it's the rap equivalent of death metal. It's had many names over the years: 'The Wicked Shit', 'Acid Rap', 'Death Rap', 'Kill Musick', etc. The lyrics are supposed to be morbid, violent, scary – stuff you would see in horror movies. You'll find lyrics that plot the life of serial killers, lyrics about sex, drugs, anti-religion, and hatred. All kept underground, and hardly ever seeing the mainstream."

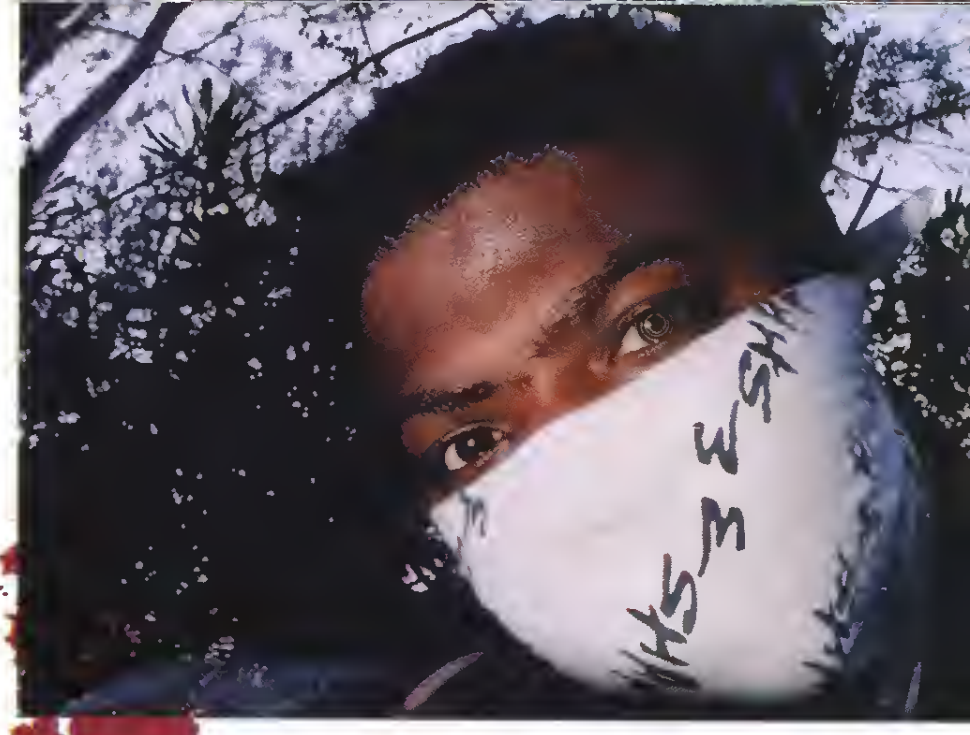
While contemporary horrorcore may have more in common with horror movies than with real life, it was arguably non-fiction that kick-started the genre. You don't have to look far for real horror in the history of hip hop. Early rap is filled with brutal, documentary-like imagery drawn from the experiences of MCs growing up in a very real hell: the New York City boroughs of the early 1980s. Rappers like Kool G Rap and KRS-One talked about getting cut up by razors, dumping bodies in the river and watching your best friend get shot to death as they developed the storytelling style of early gangster rap – content that was a far cry from DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince's goofy, Freddy-inspired 1988 novelty hit Nightmare On My Street.

Lyrics like, "Ill insanity, kill like Amity-/Ville horror, as I wipe out humanity" (Kool G. Rap & DJ Polo, Men at Work, from the 1989 album *Road to the Riches*) made the connection between the violent horror of the streets and the braggadocio fantasy of rapping.

But there are always those few artists who take it to the next level. Many rappers claim to have been the first to bring explicitly fantastic horror imagery to their music. By the early '90s there were already a handful of MCs specializing in horror raps – Esham in Detroit, Ganksta NIP in Houston, Brotha Lynch Hung and the group Insane Poetry on the west coast – but there are two that stand out for their influence and diabolical vision: Kool Keith and The Geto Boys.

If you've heard Kool Keith's music, you know he has issues. It's always been part of his personal mythology that he actually was a patient at Bellevue, the infamous upstate New York psychiatric hospital. True or not, one of the directions his demented mind took him early in his career found him deep in horror country: "I'm iller, a South Bronx killer/I chop rappers, and throw em in the river/Tastin', as I swallow your liver/Here's your brain for your girl I can give her/messages, clues from a murderer" (Ultramagnetic MCs, Break North, from the 1988 album *Critical Beatdown*).

But it's The Geto Boys who are probably the most definitive origin point for what has evolved into the evil rap of modern artists like Necro. The track Mind Of A Lunatic, from their self-titled 1990 album, is an explicitly horrific fantasy where Bushwick Bill, Scarface and Willie D rap from the perspective of psychotic killers. In a song full of brutal images, Bushwick Bill's lines are a notch more extreme than those of his bandmates: "She begged me not to kill her, I gave her a rose/Then slit her throat, and watched her shake till her eyes closed/Had sex with the corpse before I left her/And drew my name on the wall like Helter Skelter." From that moment on, horror rap was awake and the cell door had been left unlocked.



Esham: *An influential horror rapper since age thirteen.*

Possibly the first rap artist to heavily lace his music with horrific themes, though, was Esham. Born in Detroit in 1977, he spent his youth travelling back and forth between the Motor City and his grandmother's house in New York. He released his first album, *Boomin' Words From Hell*, in 1990, when he was thirteen. Tracks like 4 All The Suicidalists and Red Rum are a mix of street life and horror fantasy, the lyrics sliding back and forth from murder and crack addiction to Satan and serial killing. It may not have been the most influential straight-up horror rap record, but you'd be hard pressed to find an earlier one.

"The big debate of when [horror rap] started will always plague this genre," says Kap. "But personally for me, I remember going into the local record store in 1990 and seeing [Esham's] red cassette tape. If you wanted something wicked, to me, that red tape was as evil as rap got, and to me it defined what this genre is today. It's one thing to rap about killing a man over gangs, drugs, and money, but it's another thing to rap about suicide and blasphemy, and to be branded as unholy."

The style kept evolving, thanks in part to another MC who pushed the limits early in the '90s. Ganksta NIP, a rapper from Houston who reputedly helped The Geto Boys write Mind Of A Lunatic. NIP (which stands for Nation of Islam is Powerful) released his debut album, *The South Park Psycho*, in 1992, featuring songs like Psycho, Slaughter and Paranoid. The first track on the album, Horror Movie Rap, perfectly encapsulates NIP's gangster insanity, right from its sing song beginning: "A tisket, a tasket, a bloody, bloody basket/Cut his head and ate his leg, now he's in a casket/A tisket, a tasket, NIP and Dope-E did it/He tried to get smart so we ripped out his heart/Cooked it and we split it." NIP's imagery broke terrifying new ground in the genre and made him one of the most feared rappers in Houston.

As commercially viable hip hop grew more violent and more sexual in the early '90s, Def Jam founder Russell Simmons tried to stay ahead of the game by signing a group of rappers called The Flatlinerz. The Flatlinerz' image was dark to say the least. The violent content of their

"If you put rap music and a horror movie in a blender, horrorcore would come out." kapitol g, of kgp



Frukwan: A founding member of The Gravediggaz.

lyrics crossed the line into Satanic imagery, making them stand out enough to get Def Jam's attention. It helped, of course, that their front man was Simmons' nephew. The Flatlinerz' 1994 debut album, *U.S.A.* (Under Satan's Authority), sold just under 200,000 copies, though, and Russell rewarded his nephew by promptly dropping him from the label.

Meanwhile, across town, the diabolical Prince Paul was down in his laboratory performing his own experiments on the corpse of New York rap, and has a different story to tell.

"I brought that concept to Russell way beforehand, and they looked at me like I was stupid," he recalls. "I brought it to Tommy Boy, I brought it everywhere. We were recording as the Gravediggaz since '92, and nobody would touch it. Everybody was like, nah, it sounds too gimmicky. And ironically, Russell comes out with the Flatlinerz, and we're like, isn't that weird?"

Angry at the industry for their unwillingness to take chances and champion originality, Paul put together a group made up entirely of artists who had also been dropped by their record label, Tommy Boy. With MCs Frukwan and Poetic, along with MC/producer Prince Rakeem – now calling himself The RZA – he formed The Gravediggaz and poured his angst into his beats.

"All the music I was givin' the guys from the gate was just dark," Paul explains. "And everybody knew what the vibe was, 'cause everybody felt like that. Everybody had a little anger in them. So the concept all based itself around the tone of the music."

The disc became a certified hip-hop classic, catching a unique moment in time: Prince Paul in full stride, having just finished his three-album collaboration with De La Soul; The RZA just beginning to blossom into the creative force that would literally change the face of hip hop forever; Frukwan, the wise, battle-scarred MC from the legendary group Stetsasonic, and Poetic, a phenomenal MC as hungry as they come, literally homeless when the group was signed by Gee Street records.

The Gravediggaz' creatively powerful debut broke new ground in horror rap by being just as smart and funny as they were dark and disturbing. Lyrics from the Diary Of A Madman single include the lines: "Possessed by evil spirits, voices from the dead/I come forth with Gravediggaz in a head full of dread/I've been examined ever since I was semen/They took a sonogram and seen the image of a demon."

"I like *Young Frankenstein*," says Paul. "I saw it as a kid, and it gave me nightmares. It wasn't until I was older that I realized it was a comedy. But when I first saw *Hellraiser*, I was a teenager, and it actually sent a chill up my spine. Then as time went on, I really got into things like *Blood-sucking Freaks*, *Frankenhooker*... I like twisted movies: *Make Them Die Slowly*, *Evil Dead 2*. To me that was brilliant."

The Gravediggaz album *6 Feet Deep* (originally called *Niggamortis*) showed listeners that the horror of their imagination was right at their front door, if they would only look: crackheads were zombies, suburban kids committed suicide, and the unenlightened masses were the real walking dead.

"It was more metaphoric," Paul points out. "We were just, like, 'Eff everybody!' So the concept came from that – everybody thought we were 'dead.' That's what the Gravediggaz thing was about. And the concept was us raising ourselves up. It was kind of a segue to something different. And we got caught up in the horrorcore thing."

The term "horrorcore" itself was a media creation, dreamed up by *Billboard* music writer Havelock Nelson, and coined during an interview with the Gravediggaz, who felt it was "stupid." Eventually "horrorcore", the media creation, fizzled out in the wake of the resurgence of New York street rap – the brutal reality rhymes of Biggie Smalls and Nas left no room for fantastic metaphors. Prince Paul moved on to other projects, the RZA put his energy into the Wu-Tang Clan, and horror rap went back underground. Esham continued to put out more than an album a year, both on his own and as part of his group NATAS, but failed to find an audience outside of his core fan base. For the remainder of the '90s, the only horror in mainstream rap was the double-murder of Biggie and Tupac.

However, underneath the decade's radar, a splinter group was taking shape. Fuelled by the cult-like popularity of Detroit's Insane Clown Posse (themselves heavily influenced by Esham), theatrical horror rappers were carving out a niche for themselves. They wore makeup, they had elaborate stage shows, and their fans called themselves "Juggalos". By the end of the '90s, ICP was signed to a major label, they were grooming an assortment of protégé groups on their own subsidiary, Psychopathic Records, and it seemed that horrorcore was back as an official subgenre. The violent, misogynistic lyrics of the artists on Psychopathic Records seemed to be the absolute extreme of what an artist could get away with in terms of horror and hip hop.

Then along came Necro.

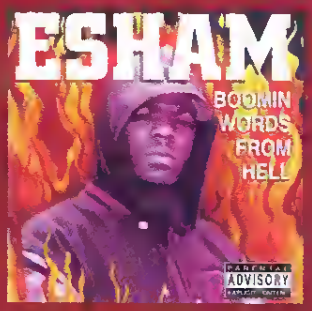
Originally bred on hardcore metal, the Brooklyn native started rapping at thirteen. He won freestyle battles and turned heads with the unprecedented level of brutality in his raps. In a genre known for excessive sexual and violent lyrical content, Necro set out to lower the bar even further. In 2000, he put out his first full-length LP, *I Need Drugs*, and changed the game. His music had all the morbidity of a low-budget German zombie movie, all the intensity of grind-

Wanna feel the evil sting of horror hip hop but don't know where to start? Give these rude rhymes a spin...

the Sickest beats:

Six Essential Horror Rap Albums

by Jason Lapeyre



Boomin Words From Hell

ESHAM (TVT, 1990)

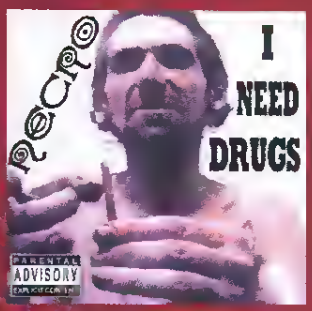
At the time it must have sounded primitive, relying more on 808s, studio-played bass lines and drum-machine snares than on the denser production sound of 1990s hip hop, but this debut album from Esham has aged well. The horror elements of the record are tame by today's standards, but at the time it was shocking to hear some thirteen-year-old kid rhyming "A homicidal vital recital was my title/got a serious psychological problem/death's my idol". While it lacks the depth of the Geto Boys' previous year's debut, it's still a seminal horror-rap record.



6 Feet Deep

GRAVEDIGGAZ (Gee Street, 1994)

Regardless of the hype, this is the best album to come from the subgenre, a certified hip hop classic. The disc was so creatively powerful it made the whole industry feel like it was missing out on something and spawned the fictional media creation known as "horrorcore". The CD would have been interesting enough just as a showcase for two absurdly talented producers to combine their styles, but the lyrics were a new level of darkness for hip hop: "I've been examined ever since I was semen/They took a sonagram and seen the image of a demon." With a skillful balance of street reality, horror metaphors and tongue-in-cheek humour, the Gravediggaz blazed a trail that was just too damn weird for anyone to follow – including themselves.



I Need Drugs

NECRO (Psycho+Logical, 2000)

"Dancin' on your grave like Baryshnikov…" With these words, Necro launched his first full-length album and the most vile rap record to date. *I Need Drugs* is built on a foundation of dark, brutal sounds without losing track of what makes hip-hop funky. Necro spends most of the album lyrically smashing his opponents, and only occasionally do his lyrics venture into the fantastically macabre. Nevertheless, a feeling of loathsomeness and depravity permeates the whole record, and the overall effect is horrifying. Even Necro's jokes make you squirm: the album's title track is a reworking of LL Cool J's I Need Love from the perspective of an out-of-control addict. A quality piece of filth well worth your time.



The Sexorcist

NECRD (Psycho+Logical, 2005)

Not even twenty seconds into the record, Necro has already kicked the line "Stickin' a gun in your cunt/for fun." If you've ever wanted the audio version of a snuff/smut film, then pony up. *The Sexorcist* is a concept record, allowing Necro to let loose his id exclusively on the topic of, uh, women. It may not sound like a horrifying record. But there's enough torture here to make Amnesty International put Necro on their watch list for the next ten years. A disgusting new low for an artist whose records make you feel like taking a shower after you listen to them. Highly recommended.



6 Feet Under

Gravediggaz (X-Ray, 2006)

The tale of the Gravediggaz is, appropriately, a tragic one. Prince Paul and the RZA left the group, and Poetic succumbed to cancer in 2004. Now, in 2006, the lone remaining Gravedigga is Frukwan, who vowed to Poetic that he would carry on the Gravediggaz name and message. And thus, we have a fourth Gravediggaz LP. In Tupac-like fashion, Poetic appears on over half of the songs here, all of which are produced by Frukwan. Inevitably it suffers by comparison to the group's prior work, but surprisingly, it's far from terrible and the band's trademark lyrical darkness is still there. A stretch to call the disc essential listening, but it's an admirable promise to a dying friend.



N Of Tha World

NATAS (Warlock, 2006)

Ostensibly a group comprised of Esham, TNT and Mastamind, this album still feels very much like the Esham show, as he produces every song on the album and also takes on the lyrical bulk of most tracks. The album bounces back and forth between metal riffs (even using Metallica's Enter Sandman at one point) and funk, while the lyrics stay firmly rooted in apocalyptic, suicidal, gangsta talk. However, despite Esham identifying himself in the CD artwork as "The Black Hitler", the offensiveness level doesn't approach his early work, and certainly can't touch his contemporaries like Necro or MDP. Overall, it's the sound of a more mature apocalypse, music for the middle-aged Satan worshipper.

"I don't consider a lot of the 'horrorcore' shit equivalent to what I do... Nobody ever puts Dario Argento and Lucio Fulci, or any of the legends, in the same boat with the douchebags."

— Necro



Necro: *Part of a new generation of horror rap artists exploring the extreme*

core death metal, and more grimy porn than a back-alley copy of *Hustler*. His lyrics were magnificently nasty. "Drinking the bile out your pancreas/the fanciest/cancerous/talkin' lyricist packin' shank on the hips/you're a skanky bitch/slit your wrists/clitoris/if you're inhibited/I'll piss in your syphilis/incubus." With his equally fucked-up brother Ill Bill at his side, Necro quickly stood out from other rappers who were trying to sound horrifying.

"I don't consider a lot of the 'horrorcore' shit equivalent to what I do," says Necro, who prefers the term Death Rap to define his music. "Nobody ever puts Dario Argento and Lucio Fulci, or any of the legends, in the same boat with the douchebags. I don't wanna hate on them – see, there's a very thin line between hating on somebody and telling somebody, 'Yo, you're not ready yet, G.' Cause really, if you were rhyming in a cipher in Brooklyn, and you rhymed like that, you'd get punched dead in your fuckin' face."

Although Necro says he's influenced by metal bands like Sepultura, Obituary, Napalm Death, Immolation, and Death (album art for Necro's *The Pre-Fix for Death* album was even done by famed illustrator Ed Repka, known for his album covers for bands like Death, Massacre and Megadeth; and his disc *Brutality Part 1 has* art by Chas. Balun of *Deep Red* Magazine fame), as much as hip-hop artists like Kool G Rap, Rakim and KRS-One. It's horrifying reality that pushes his songs into darker territory than most other artists are willing to go.

"[I'm] influenced by real life, man," he explains. "By bludgeoning people in the street. I mean, I go places, I get in a fight. I pull out machetes on people. I pull out guns on people I flipped a grocery store once. I ripped the guy's ear off." Like his predecessors, Necro, who's on rising indie label Psycho+Logical Records, finds a musical outlet somewhere between the violent horror of the streets and creatively bragging about how he's going to demolish those who would oppose him.



And that's why Satan grabbed the mic. He needs to speak in a language that his audience will understand, and rap is the language of frustrated, angry youth at the beginning of the 21st century. Both Necro's label and ICP's Psychopathic Records, along with those they've influenced like artists Tech N9ne, Q-Strange and KGP, have created a legitimate subgenre that fuses the aggression and lyrical content of death metal with the sound of hip hop.

So, while "horrorcore" may be a forced, media-spawned label, the fact remains that horror and hip hop have found their own way to come together. And as Prince Paul and Necro both know, hip hop's documentary qualities bring the genre its real horrifying content – the horror of reality. What's truly frightening is the short distance between the reality and the fantasy.

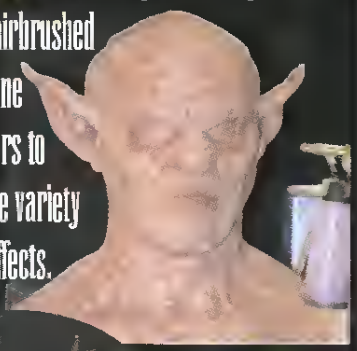
"People are obsessed with sex, violence, and death," argues Kap. "Watch the news. How often do they report a beautiful day? We need another love song on the radio like the Pope needs another bible. People love violence."



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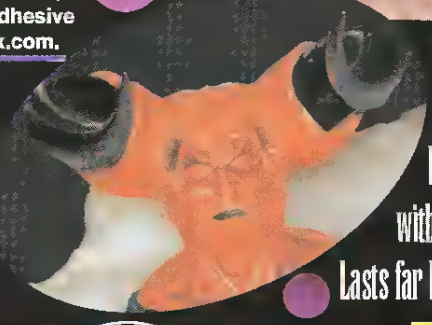
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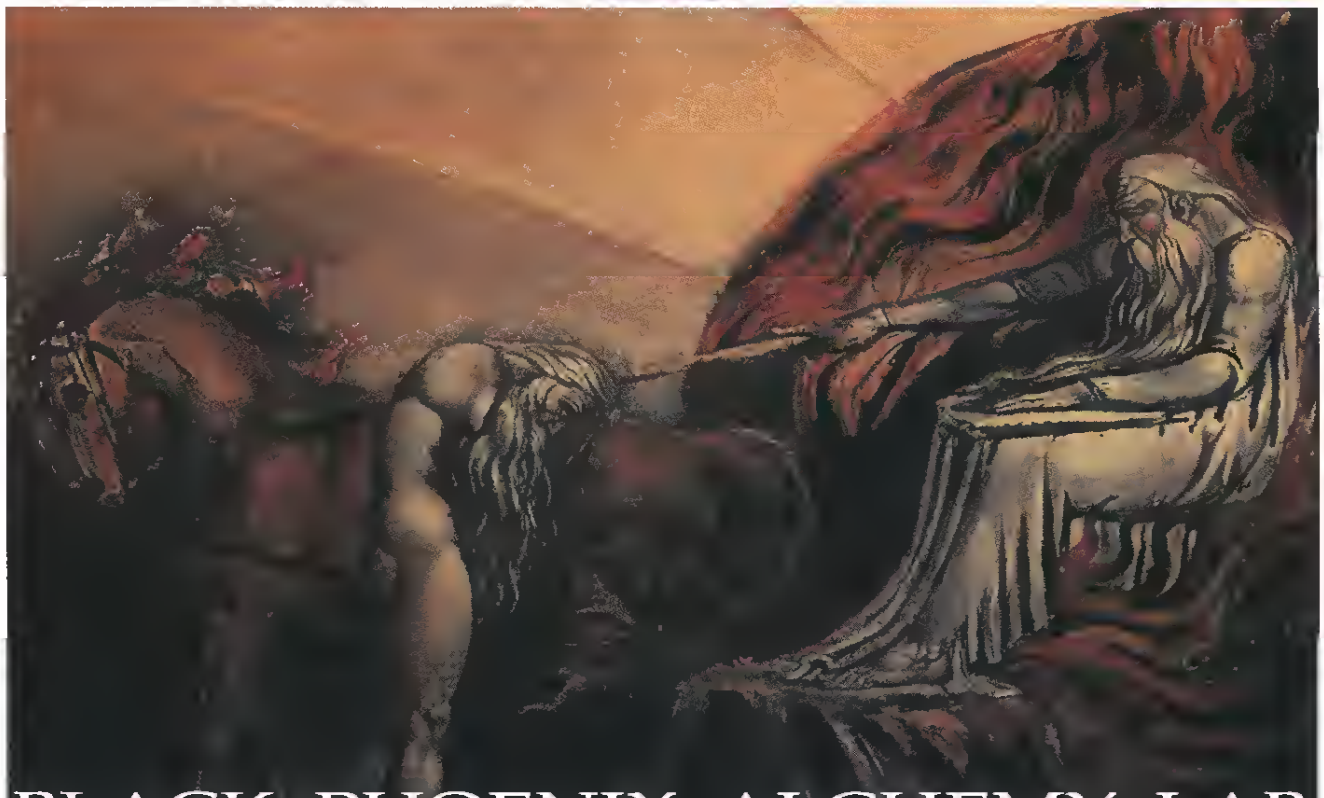


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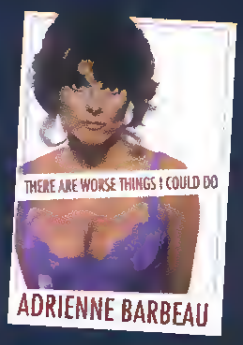
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The genre's atypical tough scream queen, ADRIENNE BARBEAU, gets personal in a new autobiography where she reveals herself as somewhat of an accidental tourist in the horror genre. The buxom bombshell spares some time for *Rue Morgue* to dish on her roles in *The Fog*, *Escape From New York*, *Swamp Thing* and *Creepshow*.

MEMOIRS OF AN ACCIDENTAL SCREAM QUEEN

BY JOSEPH O'BRIEN



Sex symbol. Scream queen. Genre icon. Adrienne Barbeau's been called all that and more. But such easy labels have never been equal to the task of describing the full spectrum of her wild life and multi-faceted career. From television star at age 27 to mother of twins at 51, she's overcome hardship, transcended stereotype and subverted expectation at every turn. With the recent publication of her intimate and entertaining memoir, *There Are Worse Things I Could Do* (Carroll & Graf), she's added yet another title to her impressive list of accomplishments: author.

Barbeau's friendliness is perhaps surprising, given her flair for playing heart-of-gold hard-asses like *Escape from New York*'s Maggie and *Swamp Thing*'s gun-toting government agent Alice Cable. And then there's her infamous martini-slinging ball-buster Wilma "Just Call Me Billie!" Northrup in *Creepshow* – a role she nearly turned down because she'd never been drunk in her life.

Having already distinguished herself on stage (she originated the role of Rizzo in the premiere production of *Grease*) and television (as a cast member of the hit series *Maude*), maybe it's strange that it took just four films, made between 1980 and '82, for her to become permanently etched in the minds of horror movie fans.

Her status was undoubtedly amplified by her then-marriage to another genre icon, director John Carpenter, making them horror's first power couple. He cast her in a pair of instant classics: *The Fog* (1980) and *Escape From New York* (1981), where she embodied his ideal "Hawksian Woman" (a term used to describe the gutsy females in films by Howard Hawks, one of Carpenter's principal influences). It was also his enthusiasm that led her to accept roles from both Wes Craven (*Swamp Thing*) and George Romero (*Creepshow*).

In an industry that's often regarded women as more decorative than creative, and a genre known more for crass exploitation than character exploration, Barbeau fashioned a quartet of diverse, atypical performances, expressed with attitude to spare, that stood in sharp relief against typical "girl" parts: strong, take-charge women who either saved the day or went down with guns blazing. She helped pave the way for the so-called "Ripley Roles" – named for Sigourney Weaver's tough protagonist in 1979's *Alien* – that have become popular in Hollywood films.

Despite her aversion to watching horror movies herself, it's an association she's happily maintained right up to the present, bringing her unique gifts to roles like Ruthie the Snake Charmer on HBO's supernatural cult series *Carnivàle* and the upcoming *Unholy* (the torturous production which she describes in gruelling detail in her book).

Rue Morgue recently called up Ms. Barbeau, now 60, for a revealing discussion that expands upon the brief chapters in her memoir that touch upon her career in and out of horror films.



***The Fog**: Barbeau's first feature film. Opposite: Her starring role as Maggie in **Escape From New York**.*

In your book, you mention that you're not a horror fan.

I didn't end up going to movies [when I was a kid]. Maybe there just wasn't that much money, I don't know. I spent all my summers out in the middle of farm country and we didn't do anything like that. Then when I started doing theatre, which was in high school, and working at night, I didn't go to movies. The only movies I really remember growing up with were *Ben-Hur* and a bunch of British, French and Italian art films when I was in college, so I wasn't exposed to movies in general; and nobody in my family went to see horror films. As a personality even now, being made nervous doesn't appeal to me, so I don't go to see 'em. I love action-adventure, but I don't want to go and be terrified.

How do you feel about being, for lack of a better phrase, a horror icon?

I think it's great. And I've come to realize, just in the last couple of years, when I started doing some of the autograph signings, the conventions, that it's exceptionally great in terms of longevity of a career because, I think, it's the only genre that perpetuates itself with young people. I had a nine-year-old boy come up to me the other day who said, "Oh, I loved *Swamp Thing*! I watch it every week!" There are these kids who are checking out *The Fog* and *Creepshow* and all of that. So in terms of longevity of visibility, it's fantastic!

Your work in science fiction and horror makes up a relatively small percentage of your filmography but for a certain sector of the audience you're indelibly associated with those genres. What do you think it is about those films and roles in particular that struck such a chord?

I guess the majority of the audience likes to be scared, likes to go through those emotions, and then come out safe on the other end. So they respond to those films on a visceral level. And part of the reason I'm identified with those films is because I was married to John [Carpenter], and *The Fog* was my first feature. And John's intent, always, as a filmmaker, has been to make people feel things. He didn't want to make them think, he wanted to make them jump. I guess they're powerful for that reason.

***You also have the distinction of being the only female in the otherwise all-male cast of* The Thing.**

I think I had an in with the director [laughs]. [*Barbeau appears as the voice of R.J. MacReady's computer in* The Thing. *– Ed*]

Even within that relatively narrow spectrum of films, you played a very diverse set of characters – Stevie Wayne in* The Fog, *Maggie in* Escape From New York, *Alice Cable in* Swamp Thing *and, of course, Wilma Northrup in* Creepshow. *They share certain character traits: they're all strong, independent women, they have vulnerability but none of them are victims. Was it difficult to find different ways to express those characteristics?

No, because I think it was on the page. Truthfully, in my mind, they were all very different. It was never an artistic question for me or a performance question, "How do I make this different from something else?" They're all strong women because that's the way I get cast. I'm playing those women because that's how I'm seen, I think. But they were all quite different. Billie and Stevie Wayne come to mind. My approach to them is always the same because I need to understand why they are the way they are. I think the danger in playing a villain like Billie, who seems so broad and could end up being on one level, was that I needed to know why she was the way she was. She didn't just come out of the womb screaming and yelling and being bitchy and pissed off. I had to find my reasons for why she manifests her anger that way. I think she was incredibly disappointed in the way her life turned out. She married a man she thought was going to make her life wonderful and give her import in the field of academia or whatever, and he let her down. That's what I was using. She wasn't just angry at him for no reason; it was years of disappointment and frustration that comes out that way.

You mention in your book that she's your favourite character...

Well, she's my favourite character to watch. I mean, I love them all, but she's so outrageous



Creature (dis)comfort: *Barbeau in Wes Craven's* ***Swamp Thing*** *and (below) George Romero's* ***Creepshow****.*

and different than I am. I like the character in *The Covent* as well, because there's something very funny, very witty about her, whether she means to be or not. But I have affection for each of them for different reasons.

Your breakthrough genre roles were all made over the course of a two-year period but you seem to return to fantastic films and television on a fairly regular basis, right up to your work in **Carnivàle.** ***Is there something about the genre you find appealing as an actress?***
In truth, the reason I come back to the genre is because that's what people offer me, and the ones I take are the ones that interest me for some reason. *Carnivàle* was a separate instance, I think. The genre itself offers an opportunity to play a lot of different emotions. The one that I talk about in the book, the [new film] that I did in Queens [*Unholy*]; I mean this is a woman who is dealing with a daughter who commits suicide, a son who is dying, a mystery that has to be solved. There's a lot of good stuff to get in and muck around with. So I think that is one of the reasons why I'm attracted to them. One of the other reasons that I take them is because most of them are dramatic, I love exploring. They're not boring [laughs]. They're challenging.

What is your relationship with your fans like? Do you have people who know you from, say, **Maude,** ***but have no idea about*** **Escape From New York?**
There's a lot of crossover. But again it probably depends upon the generation. The 20 and 30-year-olds who watch *The Fog* once a month, or *Escape From New York*, don't know *Maude*. *Maude* didn't go into syndication widely. My son, who's 22, and my niece who is 24, I don't think they've ever seen it. They only know it because they know me. But it's amazing to me how many horror fans know *Back to School* or *Cannonball Run*, that kind of thing. But the diehard *Maude* fans don't know the horror films much.

I thought I knew a lot about your career, and reading your book I was surprised to learn how much theatre work you'd done.
Well I started in musical theatre, and I just ended there. I just got home from playing Judy Garland off-Broadway [in *The Property Known As Garland*]. That's what most people don't know. They don't know I was Rizzo in the original production of *Grease*, they don't know that I sang, or anything like that.

Which role do your fans remember most?
Most recently it's been *The Fog*, in part I think because of the remake. People come and say, "I loved you in *The Fog*, but I didn't like the remake!" [Laughs]

Have you seen the remake?
No. I don't intend to see it. But I've never seen the movie of *Grease*, either.

Maybe you can help answer a mystery that has plagued **Fog** ***fans since that movie came out –***
– Oh god...

There are maybe only two people on the planet who could possibly answer this one, and you're one of them. Early on, your son in the movie wakes you up and asks if he can have something called a "stomach-pounder" and a coke. What in the world is a "stomach-pounder"?
John [Carpenter] made it up. It's obviously supposed to be a candy or something, but he made it up.

It was fascinating to discover that you'd been a dedicated, lifelong journal keeper. Why did you wait until now to publish this memoir?
You know, I never was inspired to do my memoirs, I never had any intention to do it, it never crossed my mind. In the first place I don't think my life is any more newsworthy than anybody else's.

What was the hardest part of writing **There Are Worse Things I Could Do?**
The hardest part was writing about the things that you're interested in, like *The Fog* and *Escape*, because those weren't the things that I was interested in when I was doing them, and they weren't the things that I wrote about. I had to find a way into each of those chapters because I didn't want to say, "I started filming such-and-such on such-and-such a day." That's not interesting to me. So for those where I didn't have a hook, because they weren't interesting to me, because the experience had been just a work experience, I had to find that way in. And once I discovered what that was with each of them – with *Swamp Thing* it was my reaction to the movie, with *Escape* it was what was going on in my marriage – then I was able to write it and get all the other information in. ☠



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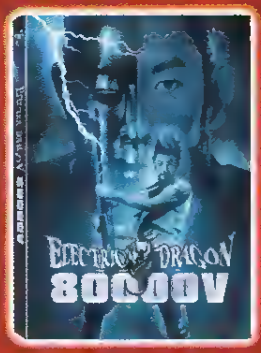
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DISTURBING THE NORMAL

BY JOVANKA VUCKOVIC

Since the tender age of nineteen, Chet Zar has made a name for himself as a special effects artist in the motion picture industry. After cutting his teeth on the remake of *The Blob* – where he specialized in sculpting and painting many of the creature's victims – Zar worked with Sam Raimi on *Darkman*, Tim Burton on *Planet of the Apes*, and Guillermo del Toro on *Hellboy* (where he designed Big Red's notorious Right Hand of Doom), to name a few. He's also contributed artistically to every single Tool video ever made, from painting a talking black tumour in Stinkfist to heading up the makeup effects crew for their next three videos. Despite these rewarding experiences, in 2000, Zar decided to seriously pursue his fine art career, much to the delight of horror-themed art fans around the world.

"I have been doing makeup effects professionally for, I think, twenty years now, so needless to say I am pretty burned out on it," Zar tells *Rue Morgue*. "As a kid it was all I could think about, but now I feel like I have done all that I care to do in that field. Fine art to me is a refuge. I get to create what I want with no dumbshit producer or talentless executive looking over my shoulder telling me to make changes that suck. I get to set my own limits, boundaries and guidelines, and the success of the piece succeeds or fails entirely on its own merits."

Zar's fine art tends to host grotesque portraits of vulgar, insecure creatures, contorted and writhing their personal agonies (see Softspot sculpture, pictured above). But there is also a twisted sense of beauty to these monsters, which, according to Zar, gives them a sense of humanity.









Pained Portraits: *Lobotomite (oil 2005, above). Right (top to bottom): Old Fool (oil 2005), Interloper 2 (oil 2005) and Joy (oil 2005). Opposite: Softspot (sculpture, uerethane 2003).*

"I feel ugly. I feel insecure. I often feel like my paintings feel," Zar reveals. "In a strange way, my work is really very sympathetic to the human condition. I think we all feel ugly and insecure – it's part of our culture. We have these images of beauty and coolness shoved down our throats to try to sell us things. The result is feelings of inadequacy, of not being good enough. I try to capture those feelings in a lot of my paintings."

By contrast, Zar says his ultimate goal with his pained paintings is to capture beauty: "If I am painting something inherently ugly and am able to portray it in a beautiful way, then I have succeeded in my goal."

Zar, whose artistic influences include painter James Zar (his stepfather and artistic mentor), H.R. Giger, Beksinski, M.C. Escher, Hieronymus Bosch and Norman Rockwell, admits that his lifelong interest in horror and the supernatural (having allegedly lived in haunted houses his entire life) also lends heavily to his work.

"I have always been drawing monsters and ugly things," he says. "Horror was a way I could express the world around me as I saw it, which was pretty horrible. I think most of what I paint now has been influenced by the things I saw, read and played with as a kid."

As for his continuing obsession with horror, Zar admits he's drawn to its mysteriously unqualifiable allure.

"I like the fact that it makes people look at things they try to ignore. But most of all, I like the creepy feeling that it gives me, and I am not sure why. Maybe I am reliving my childhood, maybe it allows me to vicariously experience a part of life that I would be too afraid to normally, who knows? What I do know is that a lot of other people feel the same way, so there has to be something to it."



THIS MONTH NORTH AMERICA'S BIGGEST, BADDEST GENRE FILM FEST CELEBRATES TEN YEARS OF TERROR WITH A HUGE LINEUP OF INTERNATIONAL HORROR FEATURES, SHORTS AND SPECIAL EVENTS. CONGRATULATIONS FANTASIA, ON

A DECADE OF DEVIANT CINEMA

BY STUART ANDREWS

For the last ten years, Montreal's FanTasia – North America's largest genre film festival – has consistently nourished the appetites of hardcore horror addicts with its annual celebration of globe-spanning, cinematic wickedness. Programming for this year's 10th anniversary festival (July 6 to 24) includes a spotlight on the new wave of British horror, the modern Russian genre film and a showcase of stop-motion auteur cinema – a lineup as adventurous and trauma-filled as any in its history.

Recent British fright flicks such as *The Descent* (see p.16) and the survivalist horror *Wilderness* (from *Deathwatch* director, Michael J. Bassett) threaten to bring the glory days back to UK horror, and FanTasia pays tribute to this new trend with a program entitled, appropriately enough, Bloody Blighty.

"UK genre films going back to the initial Hammer era have traditionally refused to underestimate the attention spans and intellects of their audiences," explains FanTasia's Director of International Programming, Mitch Davis. "Smart, provocative screenplays usually were prioritized over shock value. The emerging new wave expands on these values, retaining the drive for honest character writing while amping up the ferocity of their violence."

In addition, for the first time in its history, FanTasia will spotlight the modern Russian genre film in a showcase put together by guest programmer, Todd Brown, founder of the popular genre film fan site, twitchfilm.net.

"Post-Soviet cinema has taken so many unusual turns but until recently virtually none of their genre productions were being subtitled for export to other countries," Davis explains. "It took the huge international success of *Night Watch* to change this, and while that film was a larger-than-life blockbuster shaped to feel almost Western in tone, there have been numerous smaller, more personal and political genre films made that have not seen any attention in this part of the world."

What will undoubtedly prove to be one of the highlights of this year's festival is the latest from legendary Czech surrealist and the godfather of stop-motion animation, Jan Svankmajer. His part animated, part live-action feature *Lunacy* (loosely based on the writings of Edgar Allan Poe and the Marquis De Sade) is a philosophical horror film set in an insane asylum. This spotlight on contemporary stop-motion cinema will also feature a complete retrospective of the short films of avant-garde British animator, Robert Morgan (*RM #51*), who will be in attendance for a Q&A session, and a 30-minute animated short from Svankmajer's son Vaclav, entitled *The Torchbearer*. However, it's little-known US-based artist Christiane Cegavske's 70-minute *Blood Tea and Red String* which may prove to be the surprise hit of the showcase. Davis describes the creepy creature-filled stop-motion animated feature – shot on a Bolex camera over a period of thirteen years – as "the cinematic embodiment of creative obsession."

There will, of course, be the ubiquitous onslaught of Asian horror, most notably the international premiere of Japanese filmmaker Shusuke Kaneko's (*Godzilla, Mothra and King Ghidorah: Giant Monsters All-Out Attack*) ultra-violent manga adaptation, *God's Left Hand, Devil's Right Hand* and the latest from *Suicide Club* director Shion Sono entitled *Strange Circus*, that according to Davis is a "perverse, Lynchian, erotic [sic] grotesque ["erotic grotesque"] film that's bound to have at least several audience members running for the exits when it kicks into full force."

In recent years, terrifying tales from Thailand such as *Rahtree: Flower of the Night* and *Shutter* have pleasantly traumatized the FanTasia faithful and the tradition promises to continue this year with the inclusion of such Thai fright flicks as *Scared, Hell* and *Citizen Dog*. Other international highlights include the Canadian premiere of *Pulse* (the American remake of the 2001 Japanese horror, *Kairo*), *Frostbite* (Sweden's first-ever vampire film), *Them* (an atmospheric horror/siege film from France) and a rare screening of an archival print of Donald Cammell's 1987 American Giallo masterpiece, *White of the Eye* (*RM#57*).

The short film programs have always figured heavily at FanTasia and this year there will be twelve dedicated short film blocks including the popular Small Gauge Trauma program. The Synapse Films distributed DVD collection of some of the best shorts screened at FanTasia in its ten-year history (*Small Gauge Trauma* – see *RM#57*) will also be available to purchase.

"The audience at FanTasia has always been amazingly brave and open-minded," says Davis. "This summer's lineup is going to see that bravery rewarded in spades; bloody, hallucinatory spades for close to three weeks because we do believe in excess!"

For more information and for the complete film schedule visit fantasiafest.com.



Festival highlights: God's Left Hand, Blood Tea Red String, and Wilderness.

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A smell from Hell: A noxious odour heralds the arrival of unusual slasher baddie in Reeker.

A WELCOME STENCH

REEKER

Starring Tina Illman, Derek Richardson and Devon Gummersall
Written and directed by Dave Payne
WS Films

There's a nice buzz surrounding *Reeker* and for once it's not the sound of flies honing in on shit. Former Roger Corman lackey Michael Payne, the man responsible for gems like the straight-to-video *Addams Family Reunion* and the Chippendale dancers flick *Just Can't Get Enough*, has pulled himself together enough to script and direct a decent little slasher movie which, thankfully, does not live up to its title.

After a grue-tastic opening which belies the relative bloodlessness of the next 40 minutes, we are introduced to our five protagonists: a group of strangers sharing a ride to a desert rave. Their car breaks down at a deserted rest stop, and the weirdness soon kicks in as it becomes apparent that they're entirely cut off. Even weirder is the unseen airborne menace which begins picking them off one by one.

Now the idea of a killer smell is an odd one, but the real killer – a shadowy, gas-masked villain with a love of sharp objects, whose arrival is presaged by a noxious odour – soon reveals itself. Payne's antagonist (never directly referred to as the Reeker, but we can assume) is a creepy, relentless psychopath that isn't exactly human. What it is, isn't explained, which only heightens the surreal nature of the situation.

Making that situation all the more entertaining are Payne's kills, which are inventive, especially one in an outhouse which will do for defecation what *Jaws* did for swimming. Indeed, *Reeker* is incredibly inventive, delivering atmosphere and jolts with clever dialogue, good acting (especially from South African newcomer Tina Illman) and hard-won tension despite a modest budget – and the film never looks cheap. The fact that we care about all these individuals, even the ones set up by genre expectation to be booed and hissed, is a testament to Payne's ability to manipulate.

What ruins the film a little bit is the ending, which comes off as a conventional cop-out with a cowardly denouement (to say more would be a spoiler). Regardless though, seek out *Reeker*; it's an entertaining film that reminds us that not all horror flicks have to suck... er, stink.

Sean Plummer

NO SIGNAL

ONE MISSED CALL 2

Starring Yu Yoshizawa, Renji Ishibashi and Haruko Wanibuchi
Directed by Rempei Tsukamoto
Written by Miwako Daira
Tartan Video

Let this review of *One Missed Call 2*, the sequel to Takashi Miike's derivative but spooky original, officially proclaim the death of the "vengeful female ghost haunting an ubiquitous high-tech gadget" genre. Unless some clever director can come up with a truly compelling take on a haunted electric toothbrush, there really aren't any more scares to be milked from half-glimpsed ghosts in need of haircuts flashing their ugly mugs on cellphone screens, websites, and TVs.

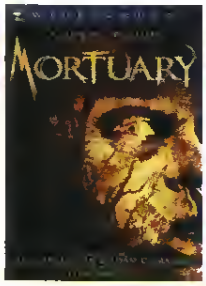


The original *One Missed Call*, which traces a series of cellphone calls that accurately predict the violent deaths of anyone unlucky enough to check their messages, worked so well because of its playful nods to the genre and its atmospheric take on the ghoulish, media-saturated world of contemporary Japan.

The sequel lifts Miike's premise and hardware (including the creepy ringtone that announces the death message – although a different ghost is making the calls this time out), and adds a series of clunky subplots and sappy love scenes obviously influenced by a J-soap opera that we can only pray will never hit these shores.

OMC 2 introduces a series of impossibly attractive and well-adjusted college types that begin receiving their death notices a year after the original killings ended. The

detective who investigated the case begins to snoop around after the first new body turns up, aided by a journalist who has a tragic past (we know this because she is frequently overcome by highly-stylized flashbacks of her childhood).



From there the film spirals into an incomprehensible jumble of investigations into the connections between the phone messages and a series of similar deaths in Taiwan. The web of subplots, locations, and static scenes of characters searching for and connecting clues to the hauntings makes the film more Kolchak than *Kwaidan*, and the leaden philosophical speculations on everything from child abuse to the afterlife suck any potential fun from the proceedings.

J-horror directors take note: *Ringu* is dead! Long live *Ringu*!

James Grainger

HOOPER POOPER

MORTUARY

Starring Denise Crosby, Dan Byrd and Bug Hall
Directed by Tobe Hooper
Written by Jace Anderson and Adam Gierasch
Echo Bridge Home Entertainment

The name Tobe Hooper is indelibly etched into the subconscious of all horror fans, thanks of course to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Poltergeist*, *Salem's Lot*, et al , et cetera, and so forth. He's earned his title as a "Master of Horror", but the problem with accolades is that they breed complacency, and Hooper's latest straight-to-video release, *Mortuary*, makes us wonder if he should lay down his crown.

Recently widowed Leslie Doyle (Crosby) decides to relocate her family to the small town of Santa Loraina, California where she'll work as the town's mortician. The family takes up residence at the dilapidated Fowler Funeral Home, and even amidst its unkempt cemetery and overflowing septic system, they try to get on with their lives. After rumours of the house's dark history surface, this average family discovers that the mortuary has bigger problems than bad plumbing.

With underdeveloped characters, a lack of crucial exposition and plot holes big enough to park a hearse in, Hooper fails to deliver even the essentials to understand just what the hell is going on in this film. But that's only half of it: *Mortuary* also suffers from serious technical deficiencies. Under-lighting destroys at least one pivotal scene (unforgivable from a pro like Hooper) and the CGI is so low-budget that a mysterious tentacle/slime creature looks like a fan-film version of the Sarlacc Pit. Doesn't anyone still use practical effects for anything but zombie makeup?

Mortuary gives several nods to Lovecraft, including said creature – obviously influenced by The Colour Out Of Space – and a quote from The Call Of Cthulhu etched on a mausoleum door, but Hooper falls way short of delivering the Lovecraftian dread that others like Stuart Gordon have succeeded at. When all is said and done, this fractured mess of a movie should be cast into the void, where not even the Old Ones can see it.

Kenneth Bonnie

SLASHER SMACKDOWN

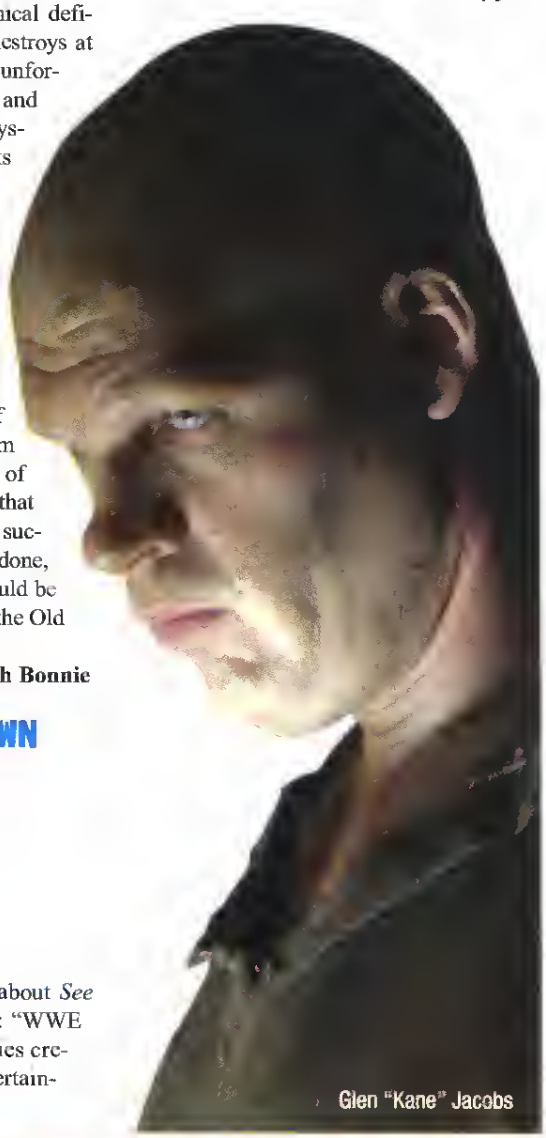
SEE NO EVIL

Starring Glen Jacobs (a.k.a. "Kane"), Christina Vidal and Steven Vidler
Directed by Gregory Dark
Written by Dan Madigan
Maple Pictures

Everything you need to know about *See No Evil* is in the opening credits: "WWE Films presents." The first in a series created by the World Wrestling Entertainment empire solely to exploit the star power of their properties, the movie throws a thuggish bald mute who calls himself Kane into the ring with cast of nobodies and a director who normally makes porn and Britney Spears videos. It should be absolutely terrible, and yet, this nasty slasher actually exceeds the low bar set for it. Just a little, mind you.

The plot is tried and trite: attractive

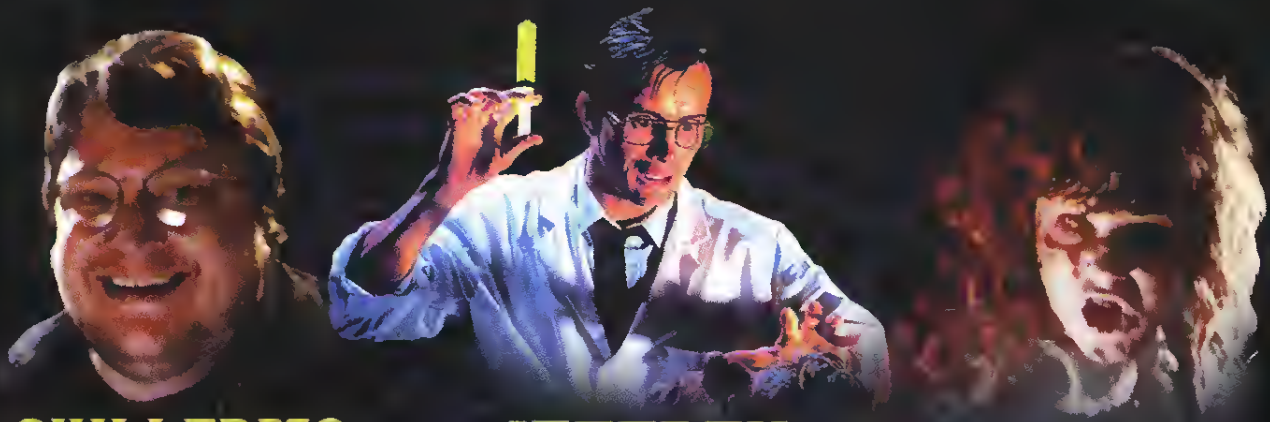
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Glen "Kane" Jacobs

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NEOPHYTE NAKATA

CURSE, DEATH & SPIRIT

Starring Michiko Hata, Mitsuko Oka and Ysauyo Shiratori
Directed by Hideo Nakata
Written by Hiroshi Takahashi and Akihiko Shiota
Asia Vision



The upside of DVD is that eventually you're likely to find everything from your favourite director; the downside is that not everything your favourite director did deserves a DVD release. Take, for example, Hideo Nakata (the original *Ringu* and the horrible sequel to the American remake, *The Ring 2*). Before making features, he directed for Japanese television. *Curse, Death & Spirit*, the first release from anime pioneer Urban Vision's new Asia Vision imprint, collects three low-budget ghost stories Nakata directed for TV Asahi in '92, and while they should interest fans of Japanese horror, it's not likely they would have been given a Region 1 release had it not been for Nakata's international success.

Episode one, The Cursed Doll, was written by *Ringu* screenwriter Hiroshi Takahashi. Dur heroine is Satomi, a teen plagued by dreams of a creepy doll. She soon discovers that her older sister died in a fire when she was a baby, and the doll, accidentally rescued from the burning house by Satomi's mother, houses an evil spirit. Cheesy slow-motion and inadequate effects mar an otherwise adequate time-waster.

In the second story, The Spirit Of The Dead, Yuta is a boy who lost his father to heart trouble. His mother tries to raise his spirits (so to speak) by taking him camping with her friend and her children. But Yuta becomes the object of desire for a dead mother in search of her missing child. Long-haired ghosts and water, recurring Nakata themes, appear, but bad child acting and a tinny synth score distract from an otherwise mildly creepy piece.

Takahashi also wrote the last entry, The Haunted Inn, the tale of a trio of female friends vacationing at an inn that used to be a mansion. Not surprisingly, Yukari, Kyoko and Akemi are given a haunted room. Disembodied laughter is heard, figures are glimpsed briefly in mirrors and spotted on videotapes (a precursor to *Ringu*) before the bubbly Yukari is possessed by the spirit of a lonely dead girl. All well and good, but where are the scares?

While *Curse, Death & Spirit* does provide evidence of a burgeoning talent, this unnecessary DVD release proves that bad TV is still bad TV.

Sean Plummer

teenagers are trapped with a serial killer – who will survive and what will be left of them, yadda yadda. These particular teens are youth offenders sent off for the weekend to clean up a creepy abandoned hotel. We know it's creepy because everything is covered in grime, cockroaches and a supporting cast of rats. Unfortunately for the jailbait, the hotel's lone guest, Jacob Goodnight (Kane) has a sadistic fetish for getting his books in eyes, and the delinquents' guardians – including a cop who survived one of Jacob's earlier attacks – prefer to drink in the hotel bar rather than ensure their charges don't make out, escape or get tortured. Remember that this was made for an audience gullible enough to believe piledriving is real, or that female inmates wear high heels while on labour projects. It doesn't need to work your brain, it just has to go smashy-smashy.

Kane obliges by tossing and dragging his victims around with much brute force. There's a kind of meatbead poetic justice to some kills (e.g. an animal activist gets eaten by dogs) and the lumbering ogre gets a rousing finishing move in the predictable showdown. Yes, it's extra gory. But it's also dumb, mean-spirited and, worst of all, boring. (Hey look, it's yet another girl getting her eyes gouged out. Yawn.) If you're trapped in a creepy hotel with only a Uwe Boll film and this, well, *See No Evil's* a winner. Otherwise, everyone involved deserves a smackdown.

Liisa Ladouceur

MYTHOLOGICAL MANURE

MINOTAUR

Starring Tom Hardy, Michelle Van Der Water and Tony Todd
Directed by Jonathan English
Written by Nick Green and Stephen McDool
Lionsgate

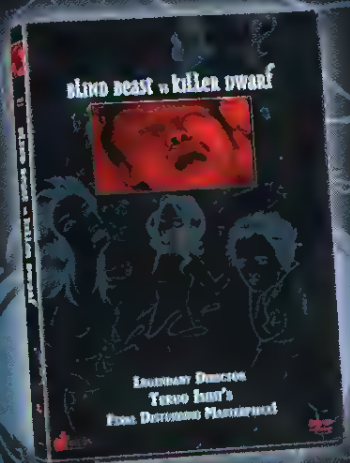
The Sci-Fi Channel is not known for producing brilliant horror flicks, but with *Minotaur* they have at least tried for something original: a straight-up stalk 'n' kill monster movie dressed up like a straight-faced period piece. Though it looks good and offers performances by genre veterans Tony Todd (*Candyman*) and Rutger Hauer (*Blade Runner*), *Minotaur* ultimately falls flat as yet another TV movie with too low a bud-





"TERUO ISHII IS A FANTASTIC DIRECTOR, A GREAT DIRECTOR!
I LOVE TERUO ISHII."
-QUENTIN TARANTINO

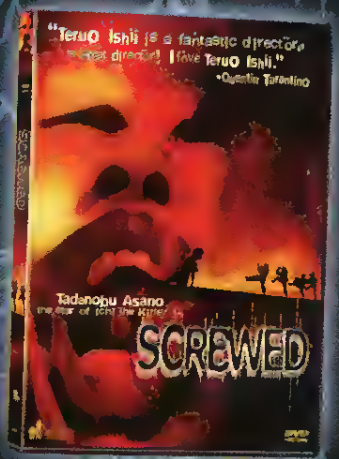
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FOUR WALLS AND A CURSE

THE HEIRLOOM

Starring Terri Kwan, Jason Chang
and Chang Yu-chen
Directed by Leste Chen
Written by Dorian Li
Tartan Video



They say the sins of the father are visited upon the son, but in *The Heirloom* – a flawed but interesting Taiwanese riff on the Old Dark House genre – James Yang (Chang) also has to cope with the sins of his aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents.

James, an architect newly returned to Taiwan after working abroad, has inherited his family's old house, a sprawling place trapped in a state of decayed elegance. From the way director Leste Chen shoots the mansion, highlighting its shadows and long, dark corridors, we know something bad happened here a long time ago. James' dancer girlfriend, Yo (Kwan), is reluctant to settle down, but moves in anyhow. Soon after, Yo and her best friend Yi-chen (Yu-chen) discover an old family shrine in the attic and, you guessed it, something bad happened here, too.

Soon after, Li-chen starts popping up at Yo's house unexpectedly, with no memory of how she got there. It seems everyone who spends time in the house, including the detective investigating the mysterious hanging death of James' friend, Cheng (Tender Huang), is drawn back to it. (This proves to be a fatal attraction for the detective, who returns minus his hands after handcuffing himself to a chair.) Soon enough, the suspected family curse is revealed, and it's a doozy. Without giving away too much, it involves child ghosts, the spirit of a vengeful mother, and the aforementioned family sins, which go back generations.

On the downside, director Leste Chen's cast is composed mostly of pretty newcomers who are unable to evoke much in the way of empathy. Chang is especially wooden, dulling the feeling we should have for him given his horrifying family history. But even his talents (or lack thereof) are not enough to mute the tragedy in Dorian Li's script. Indeed, once we discover what took place behind these walls, our reaction is as much sadness as horror.

The Heirloom is a curious film, rooted as it is in Eastern legend, Greek tragedy and Hollywood melodrama. It's not always successful, but fans of Asian horror will appreciate its attempts to steer clear of J-horror clichés (even as it sometimes gives in to Hollywood ones). And that, along with its icy, haunted look, makes it worth recommending.

Sean Plummer

get to deliver on its basic, though ambitious, premise.

In a sort of "retelling" of Theseus and the Minotaur, the movie is centred around an ancient kingdom built over a giant labyrinth which serves as the lair of a giant bull beast, the resulting offspring of a former Queen and a bull. To keep the creature happy and full, the kingdom periodically kidnaps a select number of youths from the local village. After Theo (as in Theseus, right?) loses the woman he loves to such a sacrifice, he willingly offers himself to be sent down to the labyrinth, where he and his fellow villagers think they have a shot at taking down ol' hoofy. From here on they're in standard, walk-around-in-the-dark-until-you-die territory.



While the enlisting of Bruce Campbell was enough to save the shoddy Sci-Fi channel effort *Alien Apocalypse*, there's no such luck to be had with Tony Todd. As the Minotaur kingdom's sadistic ruler, Todd overacts to the point of self-parody and looks mighty uncomfortable in his eye makeup, piercings, and faux tattoos. Hauer, as Theo's father, is his usual engaging self but doesn't stick around long enough to have an impact.

The biggest problem with this movie, however, is the Minotaur itself: a predictably shoddy-looking CGI creation (with decent animatronic close-ups). It's just too hard to find something scary or shocking about watching people being gored by pixels. Even worse, because the film presumably had to hold back on the effects for budgetary reasons, *Minotaur* is filled with long, boring scenes of people talking in dark corridors between kills. The fact that they all speak in barely audible whispers makes matters that much more tedious.

For what it's worth, *Minotaur* remains a notch above your average TV movie, with some interesting characters and a few tense moments. But with its minimal gore and lack







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OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE GETS ALIENATED

UF-FOES



UNHUMAN

Winson Entertainment

Combining black market organs and black magic curses with the best parts of *Predator* and an old *X-Files* episode, *Unhuman* flips and flops between scary sci-fi horror and a really bad soap opera. This oddball entry from Thailand is centred around a group of teens camping out at an ancient temple to watch a meteor shower. When a comet crashes nearby, they discover the Thai army has the area sealed off, and suspect a downed UFO. But when local villagers are turned into pad Thai, *Predator*-style, it's revealed that secret military cloning and organ-harvesting experiments have resulted in sex-starved, vicious mutant hybrids. Entertaining enough, but only if you can get over the fact that some of the aliens are played by guys in shitty gorilla costumes.

Body Count: 53
Alien Count: 18

KIDNAPPED, TRAPPED AND ZAPPED



ALIEN ABDUCTION

The Asylum Home Entertainment

If being abducted by a spaceship with an interior suspiciously resembling old garbage bags and egg cartons (think *Dr. Who*) isn't bad enough, imagine waking up in a dilapidated military hospital where the doctors and nurses routinely perform unnecessary brain surgery on non-sedated patients – all for the good of breeding alien/human clones. It's all part of *Alien Invasion*'s twisted plot, which has a bunch of hapless campers kidnapped and drawn into an alien invasion conspiracy that has one of them questioning whether or not she's human. Vivisection, forced electroshock treatment, a lobotomized child and other gore make up for some hokey alien effects. As far as micro-budget films go, you could do a hell of a lot worse.

Body Count: 17
Alien Count: 12

WHEN SPACE PUS ATTACKS



POLYMORPH

Tempe Entertainment

With roots firmly planted in the B-movie space alien genre, *Polymorph* begins with a group of science geek interns investigating a crashed alien pod. Unfortunately the ship has landed near a drug czar's cottage hideout and the gangsters think that the interns are after their dope. A shootout ensues with casualties on both sides, before the alien – nothing more than a wad of green pus – takes over one of the drug dealer's bodies. The survivors soon realize that the creature can assume their identities, reanimate the dead and jump from corpse to corpse in an effort to kill them all. Trying to be a super-slick alien/zombie fest, *Polymorph* plays out like a poor man's *Versus*, and has all of the chill factor of a Mentos commercial.

Body Count: 11
Alien Count: 2

Last Chance Lance

of genuine scares, it also serves to illustrate why a simplified story is no solution to a low budget and lack of talent.

Aaron Lupton

POOR MEDI-SCARE

ROOM 6

Starring Chnstine Taylor, Shane Brolly and Jerry O'Connell
Directed by Michael Hurst
Written by Mark A. Altman and Michael Hurst
Anchor Bay

St. Rosemary's is the kind of hospital that you might want to steer clear of. The patients never leave unless it's through the morgue, the nurses will drain and drink your blood, and if you're unlucky enough to have to go into surgery, well, they've gone and run out of anesthetic. But the bigger problem with St. Rosemary's is that it doesn't even exist.



When Amy (Taylor) and her boyfriend Nick (Brolly: *Underworld*) get in a car accident, Nick is rushed off in an ambulance, but Amy has trouble finding out just which hospital he's been admitted to. The police aren't any help so she teams up with Lucas (O'Connell: *Stand By Me*, *Scream 2*), who lost his own sister to a phantom hospital. With the help of a little girl named Melissa (Chloe Moretz: *The Amityville Horror* 2005), they discover Nick has been taken to St. Rosemary's: a hospital that burned to the ground 70 years ago in a demonic ritual. When they finally discover how to visit the otherworldly care centre, Amy searches for Nick, while confronting her own personal demons.

Though *Room 6* has a pretty solid beginning it quickly deteriorates into a sloppy mess as Amy, continually plagued by nightmares and visions of demons, spends the entire movie gasping, panting, jumping around and screaming – it gets old really fast. O'Connell's acting isn't any better, as he pitifully chews through the lacklustre scenery. Really, it's a sad commentary on a film when the best performance comes in the form of a cameo from Kane (Jason Voorhees) Hodder as a deranged homeless dude.

Though the movie has some great makeup effects, notably some burn victim zombies, it finishes with a *Twilight Zone*-ish twist ending that director Mike Hurst probably thought was really clever but in reality is contrived and completely unoriginal. But don't forget he's the guy responsible for the drivel known as *House of the Dead 2*. 'Nuff said.

Last Chance Lance

A VISIONARY COLLECTION OF 13 AWARD-WINNING SHORTS FROM 8 COUNTRIES, EXPLODING FROM THE ARCHIVES OF THE LEGENDARY FANTASIA FILM FESTIVAL



Montreal's legendary Fantasia International Film Festival is North America's largest fantasy / horror film event and one of the most influential fantastic film festivals in the world. It is where Hideo Nakata's RINGU was introduced to the West, where Jaume (DARKNESS) Balagueró first screened THE NAMELESS to an English speaking audience, where Nacho (AFTERMATH) Cerda attained worldwide fandom infamy and was the first festival in North America to show a film by Takashi (AUDITION, ICHI THE KILLER) Miike. Since its inception in 1996, Fantasia has been hugely supportive of short films, with their most recent installment showcasing over 100 selections.

Hand-picked by Fantasia's Mitch Davis, SMALL GAUGE TRAUMA is an extraordinary collection of 13 award-winning shorts from 8 countries. Highlights include the Portuguese cinemascope zombie epic I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS, the heart-stopping Macumba Voodoo fury of Brazil's LOVE FROM MOTHER ONLY (hailed by fans and critics alike as one of the most terrifying horror films of 2003), the British Cronenbergian stop-motion masterpiece THE SEPARATION (winner of no less than 15 major awards), the Japanese suicide art poetry of L'ILYA, and the Argento-by-way-of-Brakhage Giallo reinventions of Belgium's CHAMBRE JAUNE. This one-of-a-kind collection represents some of the strongest and most eccentric highlights from the festival's trailblazing history with the short film form and is a veritable must-have for lovers of the unusual, aficionados of the fantastic and anyone with an interest in world cinema.

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GORGONAS (Argentina / 15 min) Dir: Salvador Sanz
I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS (Portugal / 20 min) Dir: Miguel Ángel Vivas
INFINI (Canada / 9 minutes) Dir: Guillaume Fortin
L'ILYA (Japan / 39 min) Dir: Tomoya Sato
LOVE FROM MOTHER ONLY (Brazil / 21 min) Dir: Dennison Ramalho
MISS GREENY (Japan / .30 sec) Dir: Tenkwaku Naniwa
RUTA DESTROY! (Spain / 15 min) Dir: Diego Abad
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REISSUES



Evils of the Night: A '50s-style invasion flick 30 years late.

INVASION OF THE JUMPSUITED VAMPIRES FROM OUTER SPACE

EVILS OF THE NIGHT (1985)

Starring John Carradine, Tina Louise and Julie Newmar
Directed by Mardi Rustam
Written by Philip Dennis Connors and Mardi Rustam
Shriek Show

Space aliens, mad scientists, bodacious babes in bikinis, driller killers, feather-haired punks, axe murderers, lotion-lathering lesbians, horny teenagers, gory death scenes, hacked-off limbs and jacked-off jocks. *Evils of the Night* has something to please just about every horror movie groupie, and even opens with a scene borrowed from the original *Battlestar Galactica* TV series!



Extraterrestrials land on Earth and hire a couple of deadbeat mechanics to kidnap teenagers and take them to a makeshift hospital so their blood can be drained to save the dying alien race. Much intergalactic tomfoolery ensues as horny teens fight evil ETs. Tina Louise (Ginger from *Gilligan's Island*), Julie Newmar (Catwoman from the *Batman* TV series) and John Carradine (*House Of Frankenstein*) star as the evil aliens, who sap the life juice from the heaving bosoms of their helpless victims.

Sounding like something appearing at a double feature drive-in fright flick in the '50s, it's hard to believe this film is from 1985, a time when movie aliens were the terrifying, tentacled type from *The Thing* or the silent but deadly type in *Aliens*. In *Evils of the Night* however, the ETs take a giant leap backwards, losing the tentacles and fangs. Instead, they're crammed into tight-fitting shiny blue and silver space suits (that would look more at home in a *Jetsons* cartoon) and have beautifully coiffed hair.

Aldo Ray (*Curse of the Living Dead*) and Neville Brand (*Killdozer*) star as the two sadistic kidnappers and are absolutely loathsome in their roles, which is a great counterpoint to the rest of the cast, who are made up almost entirely of perky porn stars like Amber Lynn and Crystal Breeze.

Though the Shriek Show DVD reissue is bare bones, *Evils of the Night* still holds up, proving to be an entertaining time-killer chock full of gratuitous gore, bountiful T&A and a chance to see master horror thespian Carradine in one of his last cinematic efforts.

Last Chance Lance

RETRO RAGE PLAGUE

WARNING SIGN (1985)

Starring Kathleen Quinlan, Sam Waterston and Yaphet Koto
Directed by Hal Barwood
Written by Hal Barwood and Matthew Robbins
Anchor Bay

I pretty much stand alone in championing Paul Anderson's *Resident Evil* as a slick, sexy, effective slice of high-tech horror. I'm also mostly in the minority when I say that Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* was one of the most redundant, pretentious and overrated pieces of zombie nonsense I've ever seen. However, I have come to the conclusion that both pictures seem to have sipped from the same contaminated retro-horror well, plundering a little-known mid-'80s shocker – the 1985 undead outbreak message movie, *Warning Sign*.



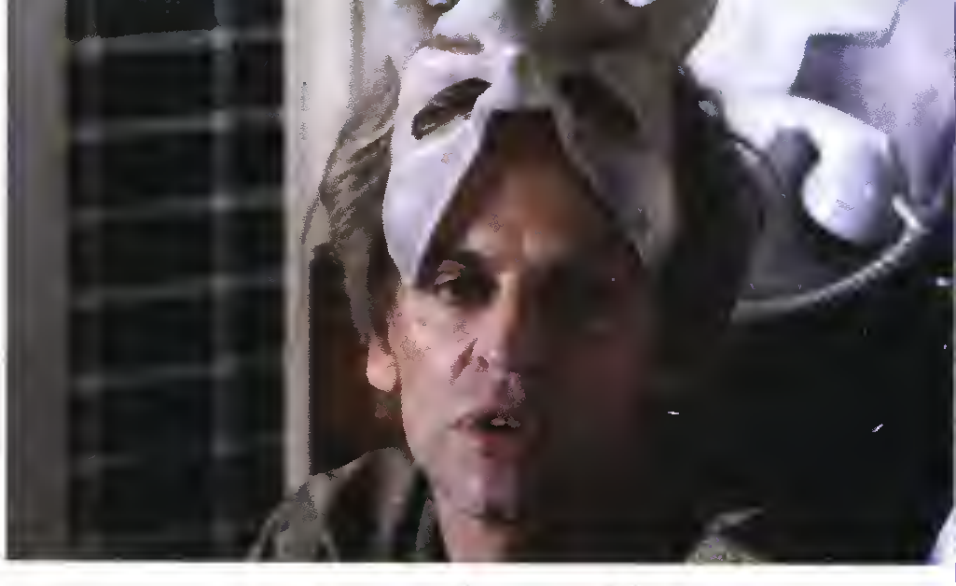
When a vial of experimental nerve gas is accidentally smashed open, a secret military lab goes into lockdown and those exposed die agonizing deaths. Before you can say "get up and kill" the victims rise again as wild-eyed, rabid lunatics intent on breaking free from their confines and killing everyone in their path. Meanwhile, plucky security guard Joanie (Quinlan) tries to keep it together and fight off the crazies while her Sheriff hubby (Waterston) formulates a plan to break in and save the day.

Warning Sign isn't really a zombie film per se (the diseased killers quite often scream about being infected with "rage", as in Boyle's film) but it does waltz to the

same viral apocalypse beat. The performances are better than average (though Koto as a jolly government heavy is miscast), the production design is suitably sterile and there are a few nice wallops of violence and mild gore present to justify its R rating.

That said, the movie is still a failure for one very resonant reason: it's thuddingly dull. Attempts at deeper meaning fall flat, and endless exposition slows the initially rocket-powered pace to a yawning halt. Still, *Warning Sign* is worth a look for fans of these sorts of pictures and yes, it's infinitely better than *28 Days Later*. Then again, it's also pretty short on mouth-watering, gun-toting, lingerie-clad supervixens, so watch with reservations.

Chris Alexander

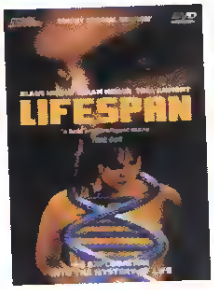


Klaus Kinski as a madder-than-mad scientist searching for immortality in ***Lifespan****.*

KLAUS AND EFFECT

LIFESPAN (1974)

Starring Hiram Keller, Klaus Kinski and Tina Aumont
Directed by Alexander Whitelaw
Written by Alexander Whitelaw, Judith Rascoe and Alva Ruben
Mondo Macabro



"Can the biological clock be stopped, or slowed down, or turned back?" asks a scientist at the beginning of Alexander Whitelaw's 1974 directorial debut, an "existential thriller" about the search for immortality. The answer, according to the film, is "probably, as long as you don't mind working for Klaus Kinski."

In *Lifespan*, Kinski plays a slightly unhinged industrialist – think a cross between Dracula and Willie Wonka – desperate for immortality. His scheme involves manipulating young scientist Dr. Ben Land (Keller) into finding the cure for aging. Ben thinks he finds it in the work of an older scientist who has committed suicide, but discovers too late that he's really just a pawn in Kinski's crazy game. Along the way, the hapless scientist also becomes romantically involved with the dead scientist's former girlfriend Anna (Aumont), which leads to sexual bondage – complete with double-helix knots!

Aside from the always intense Kinski, who delivers maybe fifteen lines of dialogue in the whole movie, the Amsterdam locations offer some decent visuals, there's a bit of gratuitous nudity (if that's your thing), and it has a moody, if mostly unobtrusive, score by minimalist composer Terry Riley. And although Keller is a handsome dud, the rest of the cast throw themselves into the weirdness.

Unfortunately, *Lifespan* also has a director who takes his subject a little too seriously, making for the kind of arty, over-earnest "thriller" that seems to be more interested in the "big questions" than being actually thrilling or suspenseful. Although the film – newly restored and fortified with extras by Mondo Macabro – is only 85-minutes long, the pace is slower than slow, and the endless and intrusive voice-over narration by Keller makes it feel even longer. Watching it, you may not be sure if life will one day go on forever, but you might just think the movie will.

Nathan Whitlock

SUPERNATURAL IN THE SADDLE

THE RAWHIDE TERROR (1934)

Starring Art Mix, Edmund Cobb and William Berrymore
Directed by Bruce M. Mitchell and Jack Nelson
Written by Victor Adamson and Jack Nelson
Retromedia

Well, I'll be hornswaggled – a whole DVD dedicated to horse opera horror? Actually, it's not such a strange concept – throughout the 1930s and early '40s poverty-row studios often saddled up a little horror with their westerns as a gimmick to get their penny ante B-films noticed. One of four "weird westerns" presented on Retromedia's new *Creepy Cowboys* DVD set, *The Rawhide Terror* offers the best peek at this oft forgotten, crossbreed genre.

The film begins as a posse of desperados murder a gold miner for his land deed. His two young sons are spared, but the eldest goes insane with grief and disappears into the desert. Ten years later the killers are hunted down and murdered by a ghostly masked rider known as The Rawhide Terror, a half-crazed sadist who sets traps loaded with TNT and ties his prey to stakes in the ground, leaving cryptic notes to warn the remaining gang members about the decade-old grudge.

Co-written and produced by Victor Adamson, the father of '70s cinema sleaze merchant Al Adamson, *The Rawhide Terror* is a swiftly-paced 46 minutes comprised almost exclusively of passably exciting action set pieces, but its most fascinating aspect is that it's structured almost exactly like a teen slasher flick 50 years before the fact. It's too bad the film is also so inexcusably cheap, amateurishly shot and atrociously acted that it's also unable to rustle up any actual suspense to make that allusion stick better.



The remaining westerns in this set are relatively far better made, but they're often more tumbleweed than terror – *Tombstone Canyon* (1932) is really a mystery, *Vanishing Riders* (1935) merely involves a gang of outlaws who dress up in skeleton outfits, and *Wild Horse Phantom* (1944) is mostly of interest for a cameo by the titular monster from 1940's *The Devil Bat*. Because of sometimes specious horror connections, *Creepy Cowboys* is only something you'll want to pick up if you're a fan of both genres, but a tip of the bloody Stetson to Retromedia for continuing to put out interesting and innovative public domain packages like this one, dagnabbit.

Paul Corupe



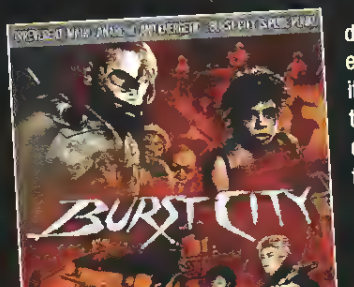
BURST CITY, SOGO ISHII'S VIOLENT CACOPHONY OF JAPANESE MUSICAL MADNESS, FINALLY RUNS RIOT IN THE WEST.

APOCALYPSE PUNK

BY TOM MES

What do you get when you take a pair of *Mad Max*-style bikers, a group of perverted gangsters, three of Japan's greatest punk bands and a feverish huddle of their unhinged fans, and you dump them all in a post-industrial wasteland outside Tokyo under the supervision of a wunderkind filmmaker fresh out of college? The answer: one of the maddest, most powerful films ever to come out of Japan.

Sogo Ishii's *Burst City* is a kind of Holy Grail of Nippon genre cinema, a movie that inspired a generation of filmmakers. Without it there would be no rapid-fire Shinya Tsukamoto epics and no supercharged openings to Takashi Miike films. But until Discotek Media – who previously brought us another overlooked gem from the more extreme end of Japan's cinematic spectrum, *Zero Woman: Red Handcuffs* (*RM#51*) – finally unearthed it for a DVD release this month, the 1982 movie was also a missing link in the West's knowledge of Japanese film. Imagine a history of horror that jumps from Hammer Studios to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* without mentioning *Night of the Living Dead* in between.



"I seriously doubt that I could make the same film again today," admits the now 49-year-old Ishii. "If I wanted a certain level of energy in the film, that meant I had to give ten times that amount of energy when making it, be that on the set, in handling the camera, or in the editing. As a result, the film comes alive, it becomes a living being in its own right. That is the magic of cinema to me."

Imagine the scene: a pack of mad punks and ravenous fans gather for a marathon concert to protest the construction of a nuclear power plant, much to the dismay of the contractor, who is in leagues with both the cops and the yakuza in an attempt to break up the rebel rousing. Further trouble brews when the bands left out of the festivities come to violently claim their stage time, a pair of super-powered bikers arrive with a score to settle and the motley crew of vagrants, derelicts and freaks hired as construction labour rise up against their employers.

"I think it came from the desire to express ecstasy," explains Ishii of the film's insanity. "That magic of cinema has to do with an escape from the clutches of reality into pure time and space. When I experience that, it's like being drunk, except that it makes my mind extremely clear and I'm able to totally express myself. At that level I am able to express the same ecstasy that rock music can create."

The movie's speed, power and intensity still blow away contemporary viewers, even those weaned on MTV and Hollywood fast-cutting, but unbelievably the director today feels that he didn't come close to capturing the real, raw energy on the set, which was like a live-in rock concert, with the bands and their fans setting up camp in the mud every night.

"It was the first time I worked with a budget supplied by a production company in advance and I thought I'd died and gone to heaven," Ishii laughs. "I thought anything was possible. Every day I shot as much material as I wanted. But I was just a snot-nosed kid at the time, I didn't pay any attention to the production side of it all. It was out of control, basically."

The resulting chaotic cavalcade is filled with unforgettable scenes, including punk icon Michiro Endo (Japan's answer to Sex Pistol Johnny Rotten) emptying buckets of offal over his audience and throwing pig heads at riot police, spontaneous onstage combustion, and decapitation by drum cymbal. All of this is served up with a straight face, no *Wild Zero*-like mugging here. But the film so wholeheartedly goes the extra mile that you don't have time to contemplate; by the time you realize you have to laugh, Ishii already has thrown himself camera-first into the next rioting mob.

Equally balanced on the thin line between comedy, carnage and cranial explosion is *Electric Dragon 80,000V*, made twenty years later and an ideal companion piece (also recently released by Discotek). Tadanobu Asano, the masochistic albino from Miike's *Ichi the Killer*, plays Dragon Eye Morrison, part-time noise guitarist and full-time reptile investigator, whose body hamesses pure electricity. He's a sort of cross between Jimi Hendrix, Ace Ventura and a nuclear power plant, in other words. Dragon Eye's life of missing lizards, solo concerts, and electric beds is interrupted by the arrival of super villain Thunderbolt Buddha, who is hell-bent on destroying him. Those with Dolby or DTS set-ups will appreciate this double dose of punk rockin' dementia – after gluing their eardrums back together.

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Had he not died in a helicopter accident at age 30, William Girdler might have become one of America's most prolific B-movie directors. His genre offerings range from supernatural horror to splatter to these two delirious nature-run-amok drive-in semi-classics recently reissued by Shriek Show/Media Blasters.

BLOOD FOR THE BEASTS

by John W. Bowen

GRIZZLY (1976)

Starring Christopher George, Andrew Prine and Richard Jaekel
Written by Harvey Flaxman and David Sheldon

"Eighteen feet of towering fury!" blares the promo for *Grizzly*, and while that seems a tad large, even as oversized mutant bears go, well, it's a freakin' William Girdler film (*Manitou*, *Abbey*, *Three On A Meathook*) so shut your pedantic pie-hole and enjoy. In a set-up integral to any post-*Jaws* Bad Animal fare, hikers and campers in a state park start getting munched by the titular fur-bearin' badass while the powers that be downplay the carnage for fear of lost tourist dollars.



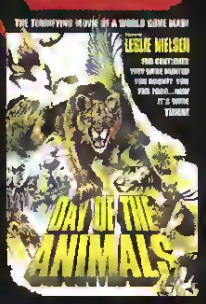
Enter '70s B-flick demigod Christopher George (*Pieces*) as take-charge park ranger Michael Kelly, who enlists the help of fearless naturalist Arthur Scott (Jaekel) and 'Nam-hardened chopper pilot Don (Prine) to reclaim the wilderness for its rightful owners: mankind. When his boss (Joe Dorsey) admonishes him with the *Airplane!*/*Naked Gun*-worthy "You're a maverick. We don't have room for mavericks", you better bet ol' Chris is gonna learn that pencil-pusher a thing or two… or five.

The bear, naturally, proves a much tougher customer, tearing humanity a new one at every opportunity, including a jaw-dropping child dismemberment scene that'll have you hitting the reverse button more than once. While the attacks aren't exactly the pinnacle of gritty realism (i.e. intercutting live bear footage with actors in fur coats), Girdler makes it all worthwhile with gallons of gore and multiple mangled corpses. The howler-enriched script is a bargain at twice the price, especially whenever George and his stick-in-the-mud supervisor go head to head. (C.G.: "It's not a bear, it's a grizzly. There's a difference." Boss: "A bear is a bear." C.G.: "A bear is not a bear.")

The dear Shriek Show folks lay the extras on with two full discs of grisly *Grizzly* goodies, including commentaries, featurettes, photo galleries and more. It is indeed *Jaws* with claws! What the hell are you waiting for?

DAY OF THE ANIMALS (1977)

Starring Christopher George, Linda Day George and Leslie Nielsen
Written by Edward L. Montroro



Girdler's follow-up to *Grizzly* doesn't quite match its predecessor for gore or sheer frantic silliness (largely because producer/screenwriter Montroro is just the teensiest bit more restrained than *Grizzly*'s scribes), but don't let that deter you from 90 more minutes of Girdleresque goodness.

So, you thought ozone depletion just meant global warming and skin cancer? Hell, that's tiny tater tots compared to what goes down here when flourocarbons and greenhouse gasses send the animal kingdom into a human hatin' frenzy. Hikers in northern California's Sierras are set upon by cougars, bears, bugs, tarantulas, wolves, birds, reptiles and – yippee! – airborne rats, in attack scenes that range from credible to downright ludicrous. Oh, and there's a pack of German shepherds inexplicably running wild in the mountains. It's enough to put you off aerosol deodorant forever.

Christopher George returns as a wilderness guide, a character a tad more laid-back than his *Grizzly* counterpart, but no less an alpha male determined to stop nature in its tracks. Jaekel's back too, this time playing a professor (wearing glasses for authenticity). Susan Backlinie pulls double duty as both supporting actress and animal trainer, although most of us remember her best as Chrissie, the skinny-dipping beauty and first victim in – wait for it! – *Jaws*. And it's a good thing the animals have all these humans to snack on, 'cause Leslie Nielsen ensures there's barely enough scenery left to nourish a chipmunk. In just over an hour he makes a miraculous transformation from a cartoonishly loud-mouthed, bourgeois racist bully to e cartoonishly shirtless, bellowing, child-abusing rapist/murderer. Plus, he attacks a bear just before the festivities culminate in an arbitrary *War of the Worlds*-type ending.

Two versions are included on this single disc: television-mastered anamorphic widescreen (1:85:1) and a cruddy-looking theatrical print in 2:35:1. Extras include commentary from Linda Day George (yep, Chris' wife) and indie horror maven Scott Spiegel, interviews, trailer and photo gallery. It's a perfect double feature, as long as you don't run out of weed, and watch the generally superior *Grizzly* second. Girdler: 2, Nature: 0!



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A MEXICAN MASTERWORK

THE CURSE OF THE CRYING WOMAN (1961)

Starring Rosita Arenas, Abel Salazar and Rita Macedo
Directed by Rafael Baledón
Written by Rafael Baledón and Fernando Galiana
CasaNegra Entertainment



The Curse of the Crying Woman: Mexico's wildly stylish Gothic thriller

Mexican horror movies aren't all about marauding mummies, heroic masked wrestlers, and goofy rubber bats – in fact, the country's filmmakers turned out several sober genre efforts in the early 1960s that were just as lavish and macabre as their American and Italian contemporaries. Often considered the finest Mexi-horror film ever made, *The Curse of the Crying Woman* is one of the first releases from CasaNegra Entertainment, a brand-new DVD outfit devoted to assembling respectful releases of these under-appreciated, Spanish-language shockers.

It's loosely based on La Llorona, a well-known Mexican folk tale about a young mother who drowned herself and her offspring to get revenge on her cheating husband, and was thus doomed to roam the Earth weeping for her children's fate with banshee-like wails. Little of that legend is actually retained for Rafael Baledón's 19th century-set film adaptation, except for the presence of an eyeless undead woman who's a harbinger of tragedy.



In the film, Amelia (Arenas) and her husband Jaime (Salazar) endure a creepy ride to her Aunt Selma's (Macedo) decrepit hacienda, but this is no social call – Selma has invited her niece because she's the youngest descendent of the original Crying Woman, a murderous witch whose immortality pact with the devil prematurely ended when she was tortured to death by the townspeople for unspeakable acts of evil. Dutiful daughter Selma has been carrying on the reign of bloodthirsty terror since then, all the while harbouring her mother's curse-bestowing corpse in the basement. On Amelia's 23rd birthday, which just happens to be the following day, Selma plans to spellbind the girl so the immortal witch can finally be reborn in her body and fulfill her evil destiny.

Taking cinematic influence from horror films from both sides of the Atlantic, *The Curse of the Crying Woman* is really the best of both worlds – a wildly stylish Gothic shocker with creepy plotting and engaging performances. The film even begins with an homage to Mario Bava's *Black Sunday*, as Selma greets a horse-drawn carriage with a pack of vicious-looking great danes in a fog-drenched forest, and ends with a gripping climax straight out of Roger Corman's Poe cycle that sees Amelia and Selma's war of wills send the crumbling estate crashing to the ground. Baledón pulls out all the stops to craft an artistically taut, highly atmospheric film – even if it does resort to a few of those trademark phony bats flapping away in Aunt Selma's belfry.

Aside from the pronounced connection to local lore, what really sets *The Curse of the Crying Woman* apart are the stylistic sequences, such as a dream-like flashback explaining the Crying Woman's tormented death presented on negatively exposed film, and another otherworldly scene featuring dozens of eyes floating in the air. Highly prolific and accomplished cinematographer José Ortiz Ramos, who had previously lensed Luis Buñuel's *Susana*, sets the mood with skewed angles and a dynamic use of shadow, but the film backs up these evocative visuals with some equally impressive effects and gory payoffs, including a vicious dog attack and the Crying Woman's grisly, mummified remains.

Released alongside the similar, but ultimately less essential *The Witch's Mirror*, a plastic-surgery-gone-wrong tale with more eye-popping special effects, CasaNegra Entertainment's DVD of *The Curse of the Crying Woman* features a beautifully remastered transfer and the original Spanish language track with English subtitles, a marked improvement over earlier editions that carried the unintentionally side-splitting dub created by American importer K. Gordon Murray in the late 1960s. Though Mexi-horror remains relatively undiscovered territory for many horror fans, this definitive edition of *The Curse of the Crying Woman* is the perfect entry point – a chilling marriage of style and substance, all wrapped up with a spicy and surreal Mexican twist. Viva CasaNegra!

Paul Corupe



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"Throughout all of its text-raping zaniness, *The Omega Man* rises up, shakes its stinking paws at the '70s sun and comes screaming into its own."

The Mad Musings of a Schizoid Cinephile



by Chris Alexander



I'm unapologetically obsessed with *I Am Legend*, Richard Matheson's nightmansh 1954 novel about a broken man teetering on the edge of sanity in the aftermath of a devastating plague that's turned the earth's population into a ravenous horde of shambling vampires. It is, in my humble opinion, the single best meditation on paranoia and loneliness ever committed to print – a sad, violent, beautiful, mean and infinitely terrifying masterwork that I've read a billion times and plan to read a trillion more. Yet, curiously, I am afflicted by an equally insatiable lust for *Legend*'s second official onscreen adaptation, Boris Sagal's irreverent, steroidal and outlandish 1971 cable-TV favourite *The Omega Man*.

Sagal's action-packed overhaul of Tricky Dick's elegiac prose is borderline blasphemous, a phlegmy gob in the weeping eye of all that made the skin-crawling source tick. Gone are the insatiable plasma-starved vampires, the suburban wastelands, the dark sexuality, and – most distressingly – the regular Joe anti-heroics of sole survivor Robert Neville. Instead, *The Omega Man* broadens its scope, curls its lip, tears its shirt open, cocks its pistols, sticks on its aviator sunglasses and gives us. . Charlton freakin' Heston!

Yes, Heston: the two-fisted, hairy-chested, rifle-totin', ape-hatin', sea-partin' iron-jawed overlord of epic Hollywood cheddar is *The Omega Man*'s answer to the novella's barely hinged bungalow badass. In this questionable rewrite, Neville is re-imagined as an uber-macho military MD naturally immune to a man-made virus that's killed off 90 percent of the planet and spawned an unholy brood of demented black-robed albino lunatics who shun the old ways and see the still-healthy Heston as a contemptible icon of, for lack of a better term, "The Man".

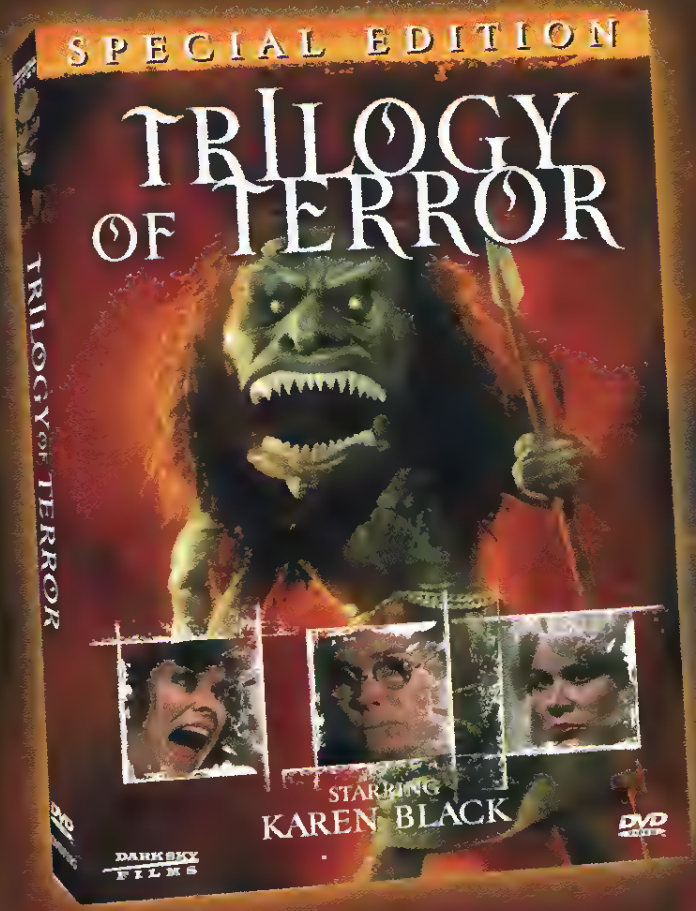


Instead of scratching at his doors with rotting fingernails and death breath urging him to "Come out", this sickly pseudo-religious nocturnal clan, fronted by Matthias (Anthony Zerbe from *Kiss Meets the Phantom of the Park*), who subs for the novella's chief vamp Ben Cortman, takes a different approach. His foul followers seek to simply execute Neville using fireball catapults, battering rams and various other lethal taunts, and he returns the favour by spending his days wandering the empty streets machine-gunning anything that moves… oh, and watching the film *Woodstock* in 35mm at the local cinema (!?).

But *The Omega Man*'s questionable tinkering with its source doesn't stop there. Heston's solitary but sporty existence is shattered when into his life some sweet brown sugar doth fall in the form of un-mutated urban hottie Rosalind Cash She's the leader of a band of uninfected victims who need Heston's blood to create a cure that will ensure the survival of what's left of the human race. A then-topical and controversial interracial booty call follows before this already Matthesson sack-kicking flick morphs into a ludicrous yet moving Messianic metaphor that would do William Wyler proud. Yet throughout all of its text-raping zaniness, *The Omega Man* rises up, shakes its stinking paws at the '70s sun and comes screaming into its own.

Anchored by Heston's intense and goofily compelling performance, laced with violence and doom, and driven by an amazing dark funk rock score by Ron Grainer (who later worked on *Dr Who*), *The Omega Man* survives and thrives, surpassing its dated socio-political trappings and standing as not only one of the holy trinity of Chuck Heston future-shock flicks (also see *Planet of the Apes* and the underrated *Soylent Green*), but one of the most enduring sci-fi/horror pics of all time. It's spared my puritanical pro-Matheson bile simply because it's just so much goddamned fun. In fact, along with the more faithful, ultra eene middle adaptation, (*The Last Man on Earth*, starring Vincent Price), it makes for a fascinating bizarro world companion piece to the brilliant novella And don't you *dare* say otherwise, you damn dirty reader Alexander out.

TRILOGY OF TERROR



"Virtuoso performance by Karen Black..."
- Variety

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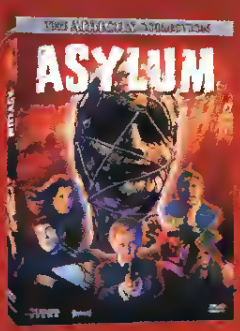
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IN THIS ISSUE!

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TAG #1
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X ISLE #1
by Andrew Cosby, Michael Alan Nelson and Greg Scott *BOOM! STUDIOS*

"It's not as simple as good versus evil." The tagline for *Nightwolf* is accurate, but it only scratches the surface. As first encountered in April's sixteen-page (and $1) issue #0, *Nightwolf* is the name of a costumed urban vigilante, a Batman-type in tribal garb whose superpowers are, thus far, yet to be revealed. But the true revelation in that issue is the dramatic twist showing that Davey Doyle is also a werewolf – and when the full moon rears its howling head, he gets homicidal.

Hence the tagline. Penance is a significant theme in the follow-up five-issue miniseries, *Nightwolf: The Price*, which debuts this month. No chicken/egg question here: the werewolf came first – it's a family curse, a back story yet to be told – and Doyle plays the hero by way of trying to somehow pay (and possibly forgive himself) for the carnage caused by the beast within. One night every month he's a murderer, plain and simple. Can performing acts of goodness for balance actually make up for that? Of course it can't.

"That's the conflict, that's the human drama," says *Nightwolf* creator/writer Stephen Antczak. The immediate question is raised: if Davey Doyle's conscience speaks to him with such unswerving morality, why does the poor cursed bastard not simply take his own life? If only the solution were so simple. Doyle cannot be killed by conventional means, as a riveting, noir sequence in *Nightwolf #0* featuring his brother, a shotgun, and a backlit cabin door demonstrates. *The Price* finds him searching for not just justice but also a cure – either for the lycanthropy or the mortality, whichever arrives first.

As *The Price* begins Doyle's in-the-loop family, comprised of brother Kip and girlfriend Shannon, try to salvage the unsalvageable with misguided morality. They set the wolf on Quad City's concrete jungle lowlifes, pimps and pushers, to start – whose scents he picks up during his vigilante patrols (while human).

"If he has to kill, if the bloodlust is that strong, and it is, then he may as well kill scum," Antczak explains, getting into the troubled mindset of his characters. The best part: morning-after werewolf Doyle remembers nothing. The worst part: night-of werewolf Doyle is 100 percent feral and if he loses the trail, he will find alternate means to sate his human bloodlust – a problem that rears its rabid jaws as early as page 5 of the first issue.



Stephen Antczak's Batman-inspired anti-hero is darker than the Dark Knight.

An admitted *Batman* fan, Antczak first conceived of *Nightwolf* when he was a child; the character was, of course, pure vigilante. The wolf's evolution proper started over a decade ago, shortly after Antczak saw the Jack Nicholson horror/comedy misfire *Wolf*, which gave him the idea for graduated powers.

"What I took away from that was [Nicholson's character] developing heightened senses and strengths the closer the moon got to becoming full," he remembers. "I knew there was something different about that, something that I could use." What Antczak used was the concept of "tapping the wolf" – allowing the human Doyle some access to the canine within, thus taking the vigilante type in an unconventional but nonetheless sensible direction.

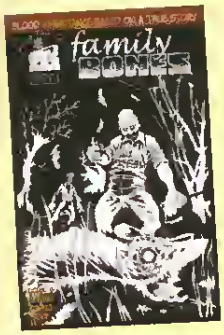
It also allowed for a unique solution to costuming. Where Antczak's original character design involved a "typical red and black costume", the updated version taps his powers via a bestial ritual that results in him adorning his face with his own blood. (Think *The Crow* from the neck up, but without the eye shadow.) And superpowered or not, you have to figure that the sight of guy wearing streaked blood as war paint off the football field would be pretty unsettling for the common criminal.

"The driving idea for this project was that there is an untapped border between superheroes and horror," Antczak says. "This is my attempt to explore that grey area, and to cross some lines." Grey, sure, but grey leaning black. Good and evil are not merely sides of a coin in this comic and, to no uncertain degree, becoming one or the other is a never-ending battle between human conscience and (super)natural instinct.

"Nightwolf is a darker answer to the superhero type," Antczak agrees. "Batman is, of course, very dark already – but Nightwolf is darker."

QUICK CUTS

While I do have a bone or two to pick with Shawn Granger's ambitious project based on a real-life septuagenarian serial killer couple currently on death row in Missouri, *Family Bones* is undeniably compelling, warts and all. Granger's questionable choice of switching up the art team for each issue actually works; Mannie Abeleda (issue #3) turns in the strongest interiors to date, particularly on the key aspect of the continually twisted grimaces of freakshow farmers Ray and Faye Copeland. The abuse here – seen through the eyes of a visiting big-city nephew – is both physical and psychological. Part three features a distressing chicken decapitation sequence; standard farm fare, yes, but its sadistic execution says a great deal about its instigators. (There's human murder here, too, but thus far it's been off-panel and only hinted at.) Granger's characterization is getting better with each installment, so there's high hopes for him hitting a bull's eye with his pitchfork by the time this American Gothic concludes.



The press release quipped that George Romero covered the night, dawn and day of the dead – but what about recess? Hello, context! *Recess Pieces* plays out pretty much like you'd expect: zombies besiege a K-8 school and the resultant atmosphere is as much tongue-in-cheek as teeth-in-neck. Fans of Bob Fingerman's frenetic pun-per-panel pacing won't be disappointed, though this reviewer finds his style more *groan-up*. And for a story that claims to be about recess (actually taking place over a full school day), this book's 96-page epic length is about twice the amount that the plot can support, any sense of suspense is all but drowned by the schtick. Still, Fingerman's eye for Mort Druckerish caricature-ization has its moments. Who doesn't love seeing doe-eyed children getting the ketchup-filled piñata treatment?



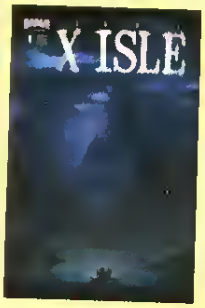
Cerberus he ain't, but that two-headed pooch on the cover of *Road to Hell #1* is plenty feral enough (the blood-red sunset helps). The debut installment of this three-issue miniseries wastes nary a moment, throwing readers right into the middle of a double-dog smackdown at the side of a lost highway. Unfortunately it's all downhill from there. There's no doubt that this path was paved with the best of intentions, but it ultimately puts the "ass" and "fault" back in asphalt, somehow managing to give us five main characters on a road trip gone literally to Hades but introducing only one of them. Clichéd characters are bad enough, but these ones don't even have what it takes to be two-dimensional. At least Diogenes Neves can draw a mean zombie – and a meaner man's (former) best friend.



Fans of J-horror need to get themselves a deliciously unhealthy dose of North America's answer, pronto: G-horror – as in Giffen, Keith. Known as the purveyor of "Bwa-ha-ha" comics (notably *Justice League International*), "The Giff" is also a remarkably capable penciller and, better yet, an excellent plotter of action and horror comics (*Drax the Destroyer*, anyone?). In terms of horror, and the referenced nihilism and technopbobia of our Japanese peers, look no further than the debut issue of Giff's *Tag*, the most refreshing thing to happen to zombie stories since, well, *Zombie Tales* (by the same publisher). On the eve of a bad breakup, a jaded boyfriend finds himself apparently attacked by a zombie. And apparently, because the creature pats our protagonist on the chest, it turns human once more and disappears into the night after saying, "Tag, you're it!" By issue's end, with the grudging help of his ex, our now living dead hero Googles his way onto a blog named after, you guessed it, the titular children's game. Here, then, is that rarest of horror comics: one that gives the reader no idea whatsoever where it's going but makes it imperative to ride along.



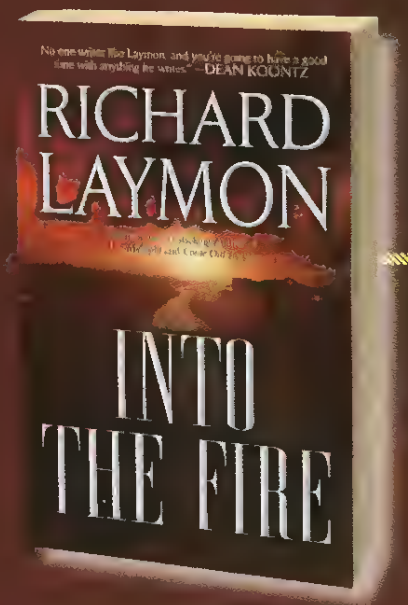
It probably sounded great on paper: a shipwreck, an uncharted island, indigenous dinosaurs that lean more towards Lovecraft than Crichton. And *X Isle*'s debut issue certainly looks good on paper, particularly when artist Greg Scott looses the beasties, notably a gaggle of giant worms with circular maws and teeth of calcified fungus. The problem with this comic? The cast(aways). Was it the roiling ocean that sank the freighter? The lightning storm? Or the incessant bickering?! Sheesh! Conflict is one thing, but these people have issues about their issues. Speaking of which, we're only one issue deep here, and while it's true that the characters need to grow immediately, at least they're already marooned and under siege, so you can't say that the writers are treading water, like *Lost* – so, we'll wait and see.





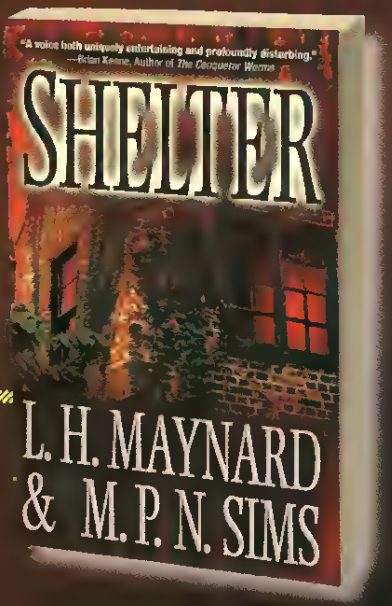


THE BEST IN HORROR COMES FROM LEISURE BOOKS



"If you've missed Laymon, you've missed a treat."
—STEPHEN KING

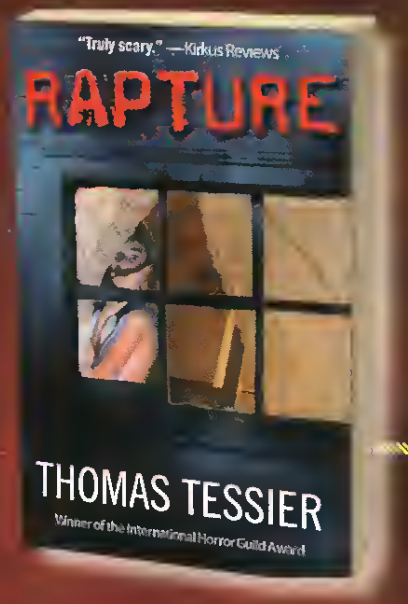
Pamela can only imagine what's in store for her when she's captured by a madman intent on keeping her as his slave. But no one could foresee what waits for her in the burning Mojave Desert after she's rescued...



"Maynard & Sims write with a voice that is both uniquely entertaining and profoundly disturbing." —Brian Keene, author of *City of the Dead*

A monstrous evil, trapped in an underground prison for decades, has been unleashed!

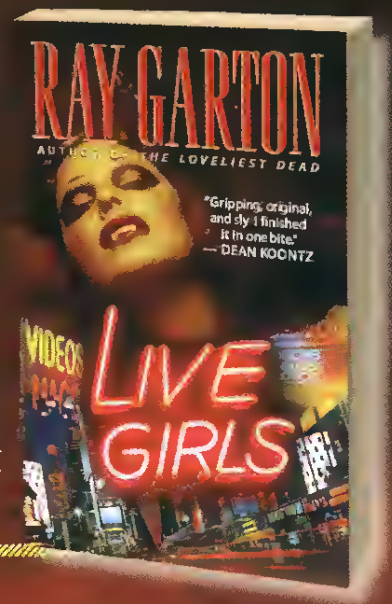
COMING IN AUGUST...



"Erotic and hypnotic. *Rapture* is great!" —*Washington Post*

"Thomas Tessier is one of those writers who can find the unexpected poetry and subtlety in horror." —Peter Straub

Jeff loves Georgianne—so much that he'll kill everyone else in her life until he's the only one left.



"Gripping, original, and sly. I finished it in one bite."
—DEAN KOONTZ

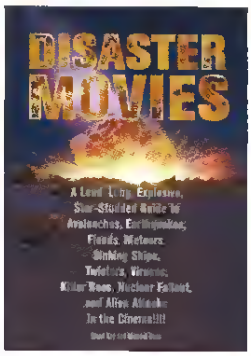
A classic of the horror genre, finally back in print!

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the Ninth Circle BOOKS

Disaster films demystified • confused Corman compendium • Horror lit lauded



Disaster Movies
Glenn Kay and Michael Rose
Chicago Review Press

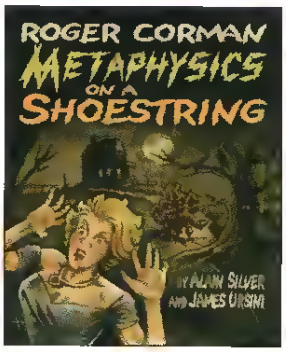
In case the words *Disaster Movies* alone weren't enough to get visions of Charlton Heston and George Kennedy dancing in your head, here's the full burrito: *Disaster Movies: A Loud, Long, Explosive, Star-Studded Guide to Avalanches, Earthquakes, Floods, Meteors, Sinking Ships, Twisters, Viruses, Killer Bees, Nuclear Fallout and Alien Attacks in the Cinema!!!!* (And yes, it actually does end with four exclamation marks.) Intrigued? I was, and despite a few caveats I'm recommending this well-researched, oft-hilarious tome to anyone interested in horror's bizarre genre cousin.

I'll admit I have a passing (read: selective) fondness for disaster flicks myself, as I'm sure many horror fans do since there's a good deal of crossover appeal. For example, I've only ever been able to stand ol' Guns 'n' Moses Heston when he's co-starring with burning skyscrapers, doomed planes and earthquake-ravaged cities. Oh yeah, damn dirty apes too, but that's a different kind of disaster.

Canadian film reviewers Kay and Rose lovingly and comprehensively categorize, and in some instances cross-categorize, the disaster film in its staggering variety of sub-genres, with essays on the best, worst and all points in between, each concluding with the film's Most Spectacular Moment of Carnage – okay, you just know these dudes are horror fans too. They also toss in sidebars like Disaster Movies' Greatest Stars, Don't Be a Hero: The Disaster Movie's Hardest Lesson and my personal fave What's With All the Love Themes?, a question I've often asked myself while jamming forks into my ears in order to block out that Celine Dion *Titanic* abomination.

Of particular interest to horror nerds, alien invasions, nuclear mutations and killer viruses get some ink here, although *The Crazies*, *Shivers*, and *Rabid* inexplicably fail to make the cut. On the other hand, *Night of the Lepus* does show up in the compendium of Most Ridiculous Concepts, so the boys haven't totally shirked their homework. Page after page of plot synopsis smacks of padding, but Kay and Rose deliver enough yuks in the process that it's a forgivable trespass.

John W. Bowen

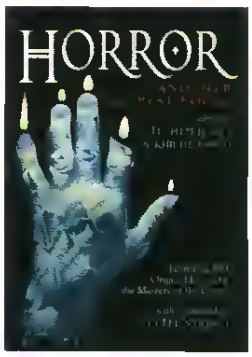


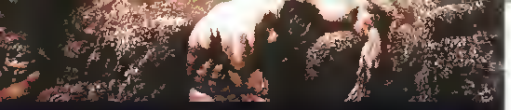
Roger Corman: Metaphysics on a Shoestring
Alain Silver and James Ursini
Silman-James Press

Roger Corman may be known as the "King of the B's" for the schlocky movies he's unleashed over the last 50 years, but that "B" could also stand for biographies – Corman is one of the few living filmmakers who can already boast more than a dozen books devoted to his legacy. While most of these works take a purely business-driven view of the man, accomplished film scholars Alain Silver and James Ursini have finally put the infamous B-movie mogul's oeuvre under the critical microscope in their new book, *Roger Corman: Metaphysics on a Shoestring*.

From 1955's *Five Guns West* to 1990's *Frankenstein Unbound*, Silver and Ursini pick apart Corman's films one-by-one, offering spoiler-filled plot summaries that point out such recurring themes as strong female protagonists, civil rights allegories, and a cinematic obsession with sight. Although it's true Corman was highly educated and acknowledges infusing his low-budget flicks with socially relevant ideas, the authors' contention that Corman cared more about exploring "oedipal paradigms" and the "Nietzschaen will to power" than simply cranking out enjoyably goofy B-movies on ten-day schedules is never very credible. And even if it was, *Metaphysics on a Shoestring* doesn't actually do anything with these film motifs beyond simply identifying them. There's no analysis of why the director might have been drawn to these ideas, no discussion of how they may have influenced others, and no conclusion of any kind to tie these loose shoestrings into a satisfying bow.

In pursuing the idea of Corman as an independent auteur, this dryly-written tome also willfully ignores the contributions of accom-





The Grim Reader

THE LONG LAST CALL
John Skipp
Cemetery Dance



What if the ultimate knock-'em-dead battle between good and evil took place in a rundown, middle-of-nowhere strip bar? John Skipp explores this almost biblical cage match to maximum limb-strewn, bloodsoaked effect in *The Long Last Call*. Just try to put this frenetic novella down, we dare you.

Monica S. Kuebler

ERIC PIGORS TOXIC TOONS SKETCHBOOK
Eric Pigors
ToxicToons.com



Uncle Pigors returns with a new collection of spooky sketches and deadly doodles for monster lovers and lowbrow enthusiasts. It's great to see before and after scribbles of some of his most popular illustrations, but one can't help wonder what he could do with a proper editor and a more aesthetically pleasing layout.

Gary Pullin

THE ATTRACTION
Douglas Clegg
Leisure Books



Life gets seriously unpleasant for five college students on a road trip when they accidentally wake up a miniature mummified...*thing* (some sort of retired, bloodthirsty Aztec god) that just happens to be the main attraction at an isolated desert gas station. Most enjoyable, but not for late-night reading or you'll swear those obsidian nails are clicking on your floor.

Sandra Kasturi



Roger Corman: Metaphysics on a Shoestring: *An overly academic look at the filmmaker's work.*

plished screenwriters like Charles B. Griffith, Robert Towne and Richard Matheson, none of whom are mentioned even once in Silver and Ursini's analysis. Thankfully, each chapter ends with a sobering (if usually familiar) interview quote from Corman himself, who emphasizes the production history of his films over any loftier intentions, and gives credit to his equally-talented collaborators.

Despite a beautiful cover by Wade Lageose and hundreds of stills, posters and lobby cards from Corman's films, *Metaphysics on a Shoestring* is ultimately about as convincing as a giant papier-mâché killer crab, and a whole lot less fun.

Paul Corupe

HORROR: ANOTHER 100 BEST BOOKS
Stephen Jones and Kim Newman, eds.
Carroll & Graf

For true fans of horror literature, the news that Stephen Jones and Kim Newman have finally followed up their essential 1988 reference book *Horror: 100 Best Books* is cause for serious celebration, not to mention a fine reason to start making must-read lists.

Thankfully, there's a whole new menu of diverse fare to be sampled within *Horror: Another 100 Best Books*. The tome, which includes 100 short essays by authors, editors and other notable personalities working in the genre today, covers everything from the obscure and the forgotten to those literary works, like John Blackburn's slender-yet-creepy 1958 novel *A Scent of New-Mown Hay*, that have been lost in the generational shuffle.

Likewise, Kathe Koja's sinfully unrecognized 1993 paean to artistic extremism, *Skin*, is finally acknowledged, and Tanith Lee's entry on Arthur Machen should point many towards his World War I novella *The Terror*.

Other potential mislaid gems represented here include A. Merritt's *Creep, Shadow!* (1934), William Sloane's *The Edge of Running Water* (1939) and M. John Harrison's *The Course of the Heart* (1992). Making *Horror: Another 100 Best Books* is not only a good launching point for the casual genre reader, but also an ideal gift guide for those who have hard-to-buy-for horror lit fans on their birthday/Christmas lists.

However, like most books completely dependent on personal opinion for their content, *Horror: Another 100 Best Books* is not without its flaws. There's a surfeit of collec-





the Ninth Circle Presents

The Toxic Avenger mops his way into print with a new book from Thunder's Mouth Press.

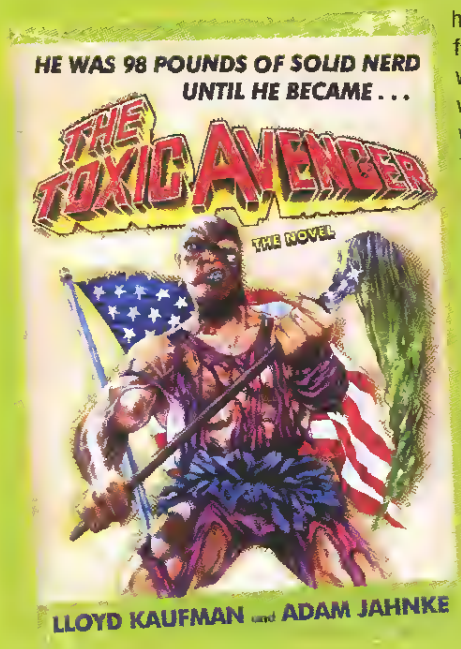
Toxie's Tale

BY JOHN W. BOWEN



For a 1980s micro-budget New Jersey-born schlockfest, *The Toxic Avenger* has succeeded beyond the expectations of its makers. Troma's titular character has become a cult icon, spawning three sequels, an animated feature, a Saturday morning cartoon series, comics, action figures and even a nasty breakfast cereal.

Once more into the noxious green goo, dear friends, but this time it ain't a sequel, a cartoon or a musical, nor is it even remotely typical of the rote, unimaginative movie novelizations we've come to expect in the wake of most hit films. In fact, it's safe to say that until now even the most hardcore *Toxic Avenger* fans have only had half the story. Sure,



Troma president and Toxie creator Lloyd Kaufman and Adam Jahnke's brand skankin' new book *The Toxic Avenger: The Novel* delivers on Melvin the Mop Boy's sundry adventures detailed in the original film, but you'll be amazed at what got left out back then – or, more likely, got added twenty-odd years after the fact.

"Think of this book as the big-budget Toxie remake no studio would ever green-light in a million, billion years," the authors put forward in the book's introduction, setting the reader up for the onslaught of radioactive hilarity.

The historical roots of Tromaville, New Jersey are extensively and hilariously detailed in the opening chapter, and we're treated to hitherto unavailable back stories on not only Toxie and his blind girlfriend Sarah but also most of the film's peripheral characters and a bunch more who didn't make the original cut – including a variety of corrupt Tromaville city officials. As well, there are extended sequences from the film, including the Mexican restaurant robbery scene, where this time a baby gets blown away. It's also jammed with footnotes upon footnotes, angry exchanges between Kautman, Jahnke and the editors, plus cameos from guest narrators "J.O. Salinger" and "Oliver Stone".

The 304-page book may be Kaufman's first stab at straight prose, but he balks at the notion of it as pure fiction.

"Actually it's the Toxic Avenger's biography, so it's really non-fiction because Toxie's real," Kaufman tells *Rue Morgue* bluntly, at the same time being sure to credit co-writer Jahnke for the bulk of the project.

"After about two chapters he kicked me off – basically he wrote most of it," admits Kautman. "It's my original story, so I obviously had a fair amount to do with it. I edited it and fucked around with it but it's mainly his writing. I think it's a lot better because of him." Jahnke also co-wrote Kaufman's previous non-fiction tome *Make Your Own Damn Movie!* and was part of the creative team behind Troma's *Edge TV*, a half-hour comedy show that aired for several years in the UK. Kaufman adds, "He used to work for us full-time but he's on his own now in LA. He's extremely talented and I'm hoping I can get him to write my next script."

Kaufman says he has no plans to further novelize any Troma films, but an original graphic novel entitled *Toxie Goes to Hollywood* is in the works. For the time being there are no solid plans for the next *Toxie* film sequel, as the Troma Team is busy editing *Poultrygeist* (due out this October), its first major in-house production since the poorly-received 2003 release *Tales From the Crapper*. The film, according to Kaufman, is "an unsparing take on the greedy fast food corporations that exploit animals, workers, and customers to the detriment of our society – oh and did I mention it's a musical!"

Following that, he reveals. "The next movie I'm planning is called *Schlock and Schlockability: The Revenge of Jane Austen*. James Gunn [*Tromeo and Juliet, Dawn of the Dead* 2004, *Slither*] helped me put together the original screenplay, in which Jane Austen is reincarnated as a hard-bodied, muscular Tromette, and comes back to Earth to kick cultural ass."

Amen, brother Kaufman.



Richard Matheson: Collected Stories Vol. 3

Richard Matheson
Gauntlet Press

With a career that encompasses novels, comics, television and film, it's easy to forget that Richard Matheson, like most writers of the California Sorcery generation, started out writing short stories for publications like *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, *F&SF* and *Playboy*. This third of three trade paperbacks, collectively reprinting the rare Dream Press hardcover edition, represents the final phase of Matheson's short story output (he stopped working in the format in 1970, although The Near Departed and Buried Talents – both included here – didn't see publication until 1987).



Despite their rarity, many of the tales contained within will seem familiar. Both Mute and Nightmare At 20,000 Feet were adapted (by the author himself) as episodes of the original *Twilight Zone* series, while Button, Button followed as part of the series' brief mid-1980s revival (albeit pseudonymously, owing to a dispute with that show's producers over the ending). Therese, The Likeness Of Julie and Prey collectively formed the basis for Dan Curtis' classic TV thrillfest *Trilogy of Terror*, and the final story in the collection, Duel, became the brilliant Dennis-Weaver-versus-gigantic-truck telemovie that launched young Steven Spielberg's career and continues to spawn imitations to this day.

Themes of isolation and paranoia run through all of Matheson's work, but these tales are like delivery systems for nervousness, short, sharp shocks that get under your skin and stay for days. His deftness at crafting unnerving twists, which practically defined *The Twilight Zone*'s style (Serling specialized in ironic comeuppance, but it was Matheson's endings that left you feeling as though you'd had your soul shucked like an oyster), are the order of the day throughout this volume.

The stories are interspersed with tributes by Harlan Ellison, Stephen King, Dennis Etchison and, finally and fittingly, Matheson's own son, noted scribe Richard Christian Matheson; each is a testimonial to the author's work and its effect on their lives and careers. Matheson himself provides brief but engaging afterwords to each story, as well as a new introduction to this edition, making this a must for Matheson collectors and casual horror readers alike.

Joseph O'Brien

tions queued up, from the essential (Clive Barker's *Books of Blood*, Volumes 1, 2 and 3) to the bizarre (*The Playboy Book of Horror and the Supernatural*), and many of the same classic short stories tend to get cited from one entry to the next, which, while certainly proving their influential nature, does cut down on the novelty factor. And finally, with all kudos to Jones and Newman, four or so pages per author simply isn't enough for anybody who enjoys watching other obsessives obsess over a mutually-shared passion. After all, in a genre increasingly dominated by movies and TV, we literate grue-hounds are enough of a minority as it is. So next time, just damn the overall word count, and give us something we can really chew on.

Gemma Files

The Distance Travelled

Brett Alexander Savory
Necro Publications

Any fool can write a novel that blends horror and comedy, but it takes a great deal of care and savvy to wed these elements successfully. And Brett Alexander Savory [*Yes, the same scribe you'll find in our pages – Ed*] is certainly no fool, because for all its horror tropes of blood and brimstone, *The Distance Travelled* is one damn funny read.

The novel answers the question: how does one vandalize the underworld? By hurling live pigs through kitchen windows, of course! When Stu, one of Hell's blue-collar denizens, decides to investigate this rash of livestock-slinging he discovers that a portal linking the nether-region with "the Upside" has been opened. Trouble is, the portal is located in a particularly nasty corner of Hell. Can Stu, an Upsider dubbed Pigboy, and their band of misfit cohorts return Pigboy's missing sister to the Upside before the Big Red Fella or his head torturer find out? Read the book and see. You'll thank us for it later.

For *The Distance Travelled*, Savory expanded upon his earlier much shorter, novelette (originally published by Prime Books) to conjure an interesting, almost agnostic interpretation of the infernal. Bloated theological musings are shunned, as are cheesy one-liners, in favour of a homespun Hell for the everyman. Here the afterlife is essentially more of the same terrestrial tedium: menial chores, social hierarchy, Boo Berry cereal and El Caminos (I always knew those cars were evil!).



Calling *The Distance Travelled* a horror novel would be misleading. Sure, there's gore, monsters, and satanic forces, but at no point does the book really conjure fear... which might be the point. Describing it as a kind of hellbilly road comedy may be more accurate. The book is humorous, no question. It's also bittersweet. And Savory's prose is tight and unpretentious. More importantly, you find yourself rooting for his gang of pig-dodging anti-heroes throughout their quest, and that makes this novel a joy to read.

Richard Gavin





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WARNING
TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR
THE DONNELLY HOMESTEAD – LUCAN, ONTARIO

BY BRIAN SINGLETON

Background illustration by Mark Singleton • Photos by Brian Singleton

In the early morning hours of February 4th, 188D, five members of the Donnelly family were murdered by their neighbours and fellow parishioners in their home on the Roman Line, near the village of Lucan, Ontario. James Donnelly Sr., his wife Johannah Donnelly, their youngest son Tom, and their twelve-year-old niece, Bridget, were attacked and bludgeoned to death with simple farming tools by The Biddulph Peace Society, a rogue vigilante faction of about 35 men formed by Lucan Police Constable James Carroll.

After the massacre, their farmhouse was set ablaze. The Peace Society then made their way to William Donnelly's home in nearby Whalen's Corners. Will was seen as the most dangerous member of the Donnelly clan. The mob quietly descended upon the house, and when younger brother John Donnelly answered the door he was mistaken for Will and subsequently shot to death on the doorstep by Society members Martin McLaughlin and James Ryder. Inside the house, Will, his wife Norah, and friend Martin Hogan all watched young John die. After realizing their mistake, the vigilantes left. Not only did that night end the days of the Donnellys in the Township of Biddulph, it created one of the most infamous legends in Canadian history – The Donnelly Massacre.

The 3D years preceding the massacre saw the rise of the infamous "Black" Donnelly clan – which consisted of patriarch James, wife Johannah, and their seven sons: James Jr., William, John, Patrick, Michael, Robert, Tom, and one daughter, Jane (known as Jenny) – which immigrated to Canada from Ireland in the mid-1840s. The handsome Donnelly sons quickly became renowned among the women for their irresistible wit and charm, and among the men for their masterful but questionable entrepreneurial skills, along with their proficiency for fierce combat and intimidation. During this time, the village of Lucan garnished the reputation of being "the wildest town in Canada", though not strictly as a result of the Donnelly brothers.

Trouble began for the Donnelly family on Thursday, June 25, 1857 at Maloney's Logging Bee on the Roman Line. Patrick Farrell, a neighbour of James Donnelly, began a heated argument accusing him of stealing the land. With both men drunk on whiskey, the debate quickly escalated into fisticuffs, then eventually, to a duel with handspikes (short wooden boards). Farrell fell to the ground and Donnelly struck him on the head. Farrell died almost instantly. James Donnelly fled and managed to evade capture by the law for almost nine months before surrendering himself to serve seven years at the Kingston Penitentiary (this was considered a life sentence at the time due to the unbearable conditions of the prison). James Donnelly survived and returned home to his family on the Roman Line.

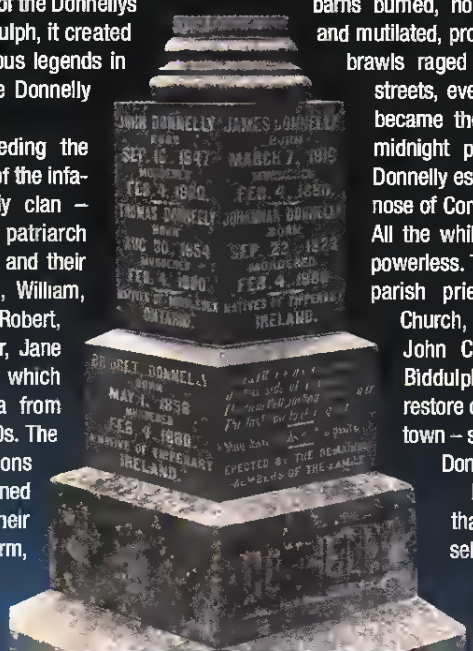
In the lawless years of Lucan that followed, barns burned, horses were murdered and mutilated, property was destroyed, brawls raged in the taverns and streets, even the Lucan lock-up became the scene of a daring midnight prison break as Bob Donnelly escaped from under the nose of Constable James Carroll. All the while, the law was held powerless. That is, until the new parish priest of St. Patrick's Church, strict Catholic Father John Connolly, formed The Biddulph Peace Society to restore order to the hellbound town – starting with the hated Donnellys.

Headed by none other than James Carroll himself, the Society vowed vengeance against the Donnellys and all their allies. On the eve of the massacre, the vigilantes congregated at the Cedar Swamp Schoolhouse, readying their weapons and setting out for the Donnelly farm. Built in 1874, this schoolhouse still stands today to the west of the Roman Line on a desolate windswept corner. It's in a sad state for a building with such tremendous historical significance, but its condition is no doubt a product of its time.

After the massacre, Will Donnelly built a replica of the old Donnelly Homestead beside its original location. Today, more than 125 years later, this same house now belongs to J. Robert Salts, operator of The Donnelly Homestead Tours. For $15.DD CAD a head, the friendly and well-spoken Mr. Salts literally throws a log into the wood stove, sways away in a rocking chair stroking a cat in his lap, and spins a quality yarn of the Donnelly family. Salts takes you on a historical journey from James Donnelly's arrival in Lucan to the massacre in 188D (no talking, though! It's not interactive). Though much of Salts' version exists in print, he does offer some colourful anecdotes and gory details of the murders and their aftermath not found in any written work.

This fireside chat also features a gander at The Donnelly Ghost Book, a private album displaying some of the purportedly authentic paranormal photographs taken on the property by past visitors. Blood-drenched history often leaves behind much more than just stories, and the Donnelly tragedy is no exception. For decades, people have reported paranormal experiences ranging from mysterious spook lights riding the Roman Line at night to orbs appearing in photographs taken at the Donnelly gravestone.

Each year, hundreds of tourists flock to St. Patrick's Church and cemetery on the Roman Line to visit the infamous resting place of the Donnellys. Many bring flowers and change to lay respectfully on the tombstone, while other disrespectful visitors bring hammers to chip off a piece of history for themselves. The original tombstone erected by Will Donnelly in 1889 was



made of black granite and stood over seven feet tall, featuring the word "Murdered" after each name. The controversial monument attracted visitors worldwide and eventually was replaced in 1964 with a much more modest marker without the offending word. The original stone is now possessed by a distant relative of Will Donnelly's in Northern Ontario.

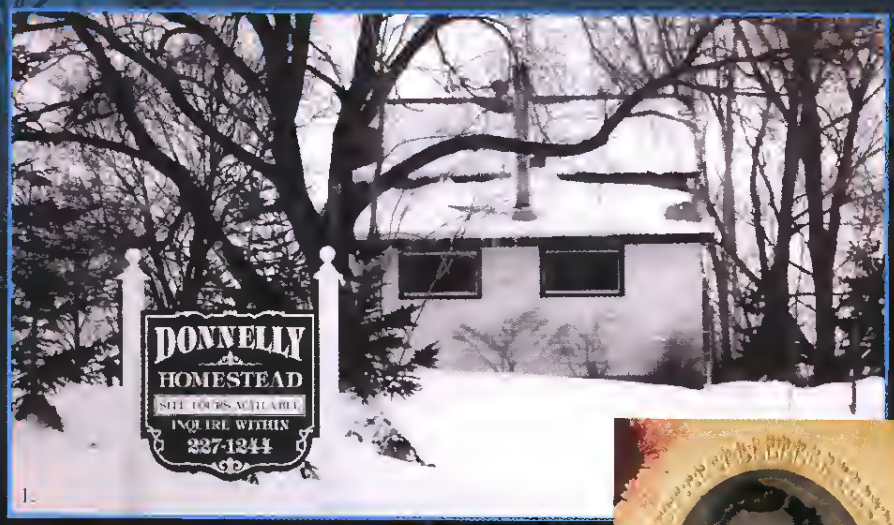
Behind the Homestead stands the original Donnelly barn, built in 1877. Many of the unexplained photographs of strange mist (or "ectoplasm" in ghost-hunting terms) were taken here. According to Salts, the barn is the most actively haunted part of the property. As a self-proclaimed psychic, he attests to the extreme sensations of anger and negativity felt inside, alleging that often times he can only remain in the building for twenty minutes at a time. Among his tales, Salts claims to twice have been visited by the spirit of Johannah Donnelly.

Salts has meticulously documented every paranormal experience since moving to the Homestead in 1987, and compiled the work into a book entitled *You Are Never Alone: Our Life on the Donnelly Homestead*, which can be purchased on the tour. And for those who just can't get enough, on your way out, you can also snag an official Donnelly Homestead Tour T-shirt for $25.00.

Today, a trip to Lucan is all a matter of perception since almost everything from the Donnelly days is long gone. From the outside, the story's locales are nothing spectacular: a lonely little town, a dilapidated schoolhouse, an ordinary church, a run-of-the-mill graveyard, and a plain white farmhouse with a barn. There are no bloodstained rooms or bullet-ridden walls. But, for anyone with an interest in history, these quiet places can be a first-hand connection to one of the most brutal chapters in Canada's past and the haunted present alive today.



To book your own Donnelly Homestead Tour, contact Robert Salts at (519) 227-1244. The Donnelly Homestead is located at 34937 Roman Line, R.R.#3, Lucan, Ontario, N0M 2J0.









Canada's haunted past: *1. The Donnelly Homestead today. 2. Patriarch William Donnelly circa 1874, from Salts'* ***You Are Never Alone****. 3. Alleged paranormal activity captured near the Donnelly grave. 4. The Cedar Swamp Schoolhouse. 5. The original Donnelly barn, built in 1877. Opposite: the replacement Donnelly gravestone, and the controversial original tombstone with the word "Murdered" inscribed.*



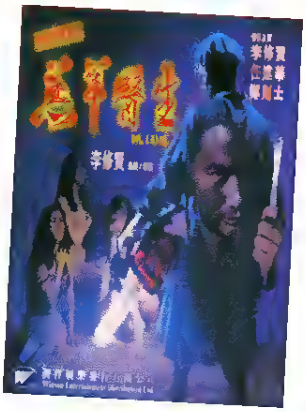




DINNER'S READY! THE GORE-MET

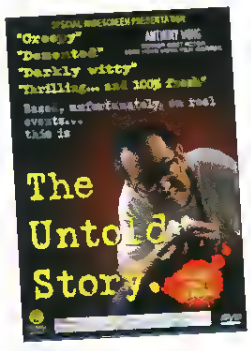
Forget Japan, the Hong Kong Cat III films of the mid-'90s are the real meal. This issue The Gore-met chews through a heaping helping of human pork buns...

In 1988 the Hong Kong government imposed a classification system on their previously unregulated film industry. The adult-only Category III rating, or "Cat III", gave filmmakers license to explore the boundaries of onscreen sex and violence. Danny Lee, a major action film star best known as Inspector Li in John Woo's *The Killer* (1989), tapped the potential of this new market by producing, co-directing (with notorious Cat III director Billy Tang) and starring in the early Cat III true-crime police procedural classick *Dr. Lamb* (1992).



Based on a true 1982 crime, Simon Yam stars as Lam Gor-Yu, a diffident taxi driver who becomes the subject of a police investigation, led by hard-boiled Inspector Li (Lee), after a film lab processes erotic photos of female corpses. After lengthy brutalization by a squad of occasionally bumbling detectives, Dr. Lamb, as he has been dubbed by the press, confesses to numerous acts of rape, torture, murder, necrophilia, dismemberment and cannibalism (depicted in flashbacks), which he had documented on film and video. The grim proceedings are leavened by the antics of the comic-relief cops, who in one notable scene engage in wacky hijinks with a severed breast.

Lee quickly upped the gore/comedy quotient and cemented the HK serial killer film formula when he produced and starred in what is the definitive Cat III film that same year. *The Untold Story* is based on an infamous 1986 crime that rocked the island of Macau, here snootily cast as the hillbilly cousin to Hong Kong. Anthony Wong, delivering the performance that won him Best Actor honours at the 1993 Hong Kong Film Awards, commands as Wong Chi Hang, a murderous HK expatriate who becomes the subject of a police investigation led by not-so-intrepid playboy Inspector Lee (Lee), after a bag of miscellaneous body parts wash up on a beach and are traced back to a local restaurant recently renowned for its steamed pork buns.



Wong, the new owner, is unable to adequately explain the sudden disappearance of the previous owners but is happy to send the detectives off with take-out boxes of delicious pork buns. After his workers similarly vanish, Wong is arrested, and after a brutal interrogation confesses to numerous acts of rape, torture, murder, dismemberment and cannibalism – again shown in flashback.

Although the plot elements are similar, *Untold Story* – often cited as one of the most disturbing films ever made – is *Dr. Lamb* on steroids. Director Herman Yau's carefully constructed carnage contains copious buckets of blood, severed limbs and dripping, disincorporated organs, but skillfully skirts censor sensibilities, even sneaking through a lengthy meat cleaver massacre of a gaggle of toddlers!

Wong, sporting spectacles lifted (presumably with a crane) from George Romero, is chilling as a resolute bastard so mean he would just as soon ram a spike in your eye or a fistful of chopsticks up your joy trail as chug piss to stop internal bleeding or saw his wrists open on the dull, jagged edge of a bathroom mop bucket .. out of spite!

Yau ramps up the incidental comedy to offset the extreme violence, and most of the Keystone-esque cops from *Dr. Lamb* return as a squad of even more inept investigators. Lee lampoons the steely HK detective conventions that made him a star by portraying this incarnation of his now-venerable Inspector Li/Lee character as a lazy womanizer with an ever-present hooker on his arm who browbeats his underlings into doing his dirty work. However juvenile, the comedy underscores the brutality of Wong's rampage and the endless beatings and psychological torture inflicted on him by the police.

Following the success of *Untold Story*, a slew of similar films were produced, with titles like *Diary of a Serial Killer* (1995), *Peeping Tom* (1997), *There Is a Secret in My Soup* (2001) and *Human Pork Chop* (2001). Billy Tang went on to make acclaimed sickies *Run and Kill* (1993), *Red to Kill* (1994) and *Brother of Darkness* (1994). However imitated, though, *Untold Story* remains the superlative Cat III film.

The bare-bones HK DVD released by City Connections Ltd. in 2000 is disappointing, presenting a muddy and cropped transfer of the uncut version. The 1999 release by US label Tai Seng is superior, featuring a better transfer of the same print in the correct aspect ratio. Extras include English-language commentary tracks from Yau and Wong, three filmographies and four trailers for other Tai Seng releases. DVDs of both films are available on Amazon, for your grue-ing pleasure.

Copious buckets of blood, severed limbs and dripping, disincorporated organs – that's my kinda take-out



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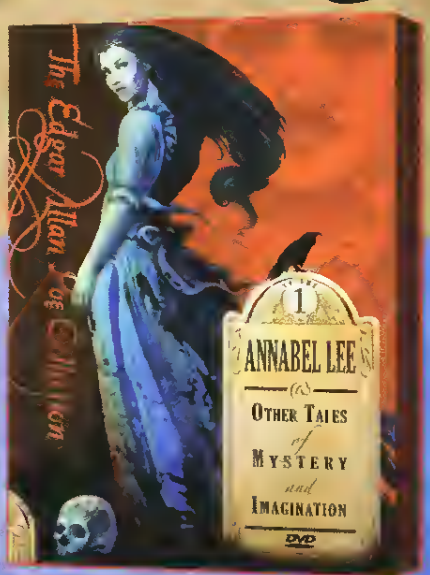
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AUDIO DROME

REVIEWS BY KEITH CARMAN, TOMB DRAGOMIR, MARK R. HASAN AND AARON VON LUPTON



THE HILLS HAVE EYES Soundtrack
Tomandandy
LAKESHORE RECORDS
FYI mutants: in the past few years the Tomandandy duo has moved away from the all-techno style of *Killing Zoe* to a more selective deployment of orchestral, electronic, and industrial ideas. This means that in the new *Hills* remake, it's mood music with a decisive construction towards mounting cruelty. Preliminary cues are super-short, but the rest benefit from mechanized synth textures, rhythmic mobiles, and atonal segments, often blended with subliminally mixed pulses and stretched beats – typical of the duo's style. The score effectively maintains total unease through flagellating sound effects and reverse-looping musical bars between the rare interludes of genteel, melodic fragments (mostly acoustic guitar). Although the CD comes with nine B-grade source songs, it's Tomandandy's meaty score that'll teach listeners to stay away from decrepit desert towns. **MRH** ☠☠☠



AN AMERICAN HAUNTING Soundtrack
Caine Davidson
MOVIE SCORE MEDIA
Backing up a historical spookshow like *An American Haunting*, it's only appropriate that Caine Davidson's feature film score debut is deliciously old-fashioned – think requisite shock stabs and a fine mix of atmospheric cues performed by the London Symphony Orchestra, some enhanced by retro synths and keyboards. Available only as a downloadable iTunes album from moviescoremedia.com, Davidson's score features a soothing blend of organized cacophony, with metallic percussion, screeching strings, sustained chords, and periodic child vocals performing a singsong theme – reminiscent of the mawkish bell chime motif in Bernard Herrmann's score for *Sisters*. Most of the cues shift between unnerving tonalities, and are enhanced by those marvelously warped strings we love – old-style, but effective in making you feel like something strange and cold has just entered the room **MRH** ☠☠☠1/2



STAY ALIVE Soundtrack
John Frizzell
NICABELLA RECORDS INC.
Stay Alive was such a weak theatrical horror entry that it barely warrants discussing in any detail here, but somehow John Frizzell did right in scoring the film, with melancholic, haunting passages and high intensity shocks that suggest something much more frightening than Frankie Muniz trying to survive a killer video game. In this electronically-edited orchestra, the score's two distinct primary themes are a screeching violin torrent for the stalk 'n' slash scenes, and calmer, melodic piano that sounds perfect for an autumn funeral. While not exactly groundbreaking, this album still makes for a suspenseful, atmospheric and occasionally frightening listen that works on your emotions in a way that most modern teen horror films never do. Having already contributed to such recent horror nonclassics as *Ghost Ship* and *Thir13en Ghosts*, look for Frizzell's work to be put to (hopefully) better use on Lucky McKee's upcoming *The Woods* **AVL** ☠☠☠1/2



COSMIC VOODOO Psychobilly
Vertigo
KAISER RECORDS
Ghostly posthumous SoCal psycho from long-deceased Cosmic Voodoo, *Vertigo* compiles rare and newly exhumed tunes from their days sharing stages (and no doubt brews) with The Meteors and the Krewmen. Typically gruff vocals, reverb, flange and cymbals a-plenty, but a cool cut like Old Man In The Woods, if released today, likely wouldn't register a blip on anyone's radar. It's a neat artifact from a time when to most folk "psychobilly" more likely referred to the semi-retarded high-school janitor rather than the humble beginnings of punk rockabilly contained on this here circular slab of plastic. **TD** ☠☠1/2



THE MATADORS Psychobilly
Horrorbilly 9000
STEREO DYNAMITE
To the chagrin of pissed-off Internet Christian interest groups who suc-



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THE CREEPSHOW Psychobilly
Sell Your Soul
STEREO DYNAMITE RECORDINGS
Slick, pop-styled psycho with shiny hooks and hair-raising harmonies, T-Dot's The Creepshow boast the sugary snarl of cute tat-covered singer Hellcat (who not only plays but practically beats the living snot out of her guitar). Featuring pristine production, *Sell your Soul* includes instant favourites Shake and Zombies Ate Her Brain (which dresses up '50s doo-wop up in '70s wraparound shades), along with a dusty ballad (In The Garden) that washes gently over the ears with sweet, consoling backups and a heartbreaking harmonica. Another highlight has Hellcat and Hooch (on loan from The Matadors) getting downright premenstrual with each other on Doghouse, a nasty bitch-slap of a duet that ends with a series of humorous answering machine "messages" left by Hooch being, well, Hooch. TD ☠☠☠☠1/2





BAVA'S BLOOD MUSIC

Put your crimson-stained hands together for another wave of Bava soundtracks. Debuting in 2005 with a limited Roberto Nicolosi disc, the second wave of Mario Bava-themed CDs from Italy's Digitmovies brings forth two collections of complete Gothic horror and slasher soundtracks by Stelvio Cipriani and Carlo Rustichelli. Each composer gets a two-disc set, padded with unreleased cues, alternates, and rare singles, and fairly detailed liner notes on the five stylistically diverse soundtracks.



In spite of 40-plus years scoring every conceivable genre, Rustichelli's best-known work to English moviegoers remains Blood and Black Lace, Bava's candy-coloured body count flick, with gorgeous babes brutalized by a metal-gloved sadist. In vogue at the time, Rustichelli employed a jazz combo with small orchestra to help Bava create murder montages as kinetic music videos.

Disc one of the Rustichelli set has Blood in bouncy stereo, while disc two showcases the haunting, romantic music of Whip and the Body. Running just under an hour, the mono Whip cues are weirdly evocative of Bava's mordant humour, and his perverse fetish of capturing beauty, as it reaches full perfection through emotional and physical torment.



Bava's sensibilities tended to encompass jazz, pop, and romanticism, and he arguably found his musical mate in Stelvio Cipriani, a tunesmith with a thematically repetitive, lounge style who sometimes managed to meet the dramatic needs of crime, horror, and thriller films.

Digitmovie's Cipriani set is worth every penny for the Mancini-endowed Bay of Blood (silky exotica for doomed lakeside revellers); Baron Blood (mediocre lounge boosted by some decent dramatic underscore); and Rabid Dogs. The latter is the set's real gem, and alongside The Lickerish Quartet, is perhaps Cipriani's best work. It's performed by a close-miked jazz orchestra, with long, meafy sax and keyboard solos for Bava's extended in-car conflicts and highway chases. Blending harpsichord, organ, drums and strings, it's a groovy jazz fusion that shows Cipriani is capable of writing superior music for tense drama, and belies genre dross like Tentacles, and Piranha II: The Spawning. Killer soundtracks in every sense of the word.

Mark R. Hasan

ceeded in delaying this very release (or so goes the tale on the band's website), The Matadors are back with *Horrorbilly 9000*, another righteous Luciferian lesson in rolling the rockabilly bones. Flame-kissed guitars in hand, undead cheerleaders in tow and musical prowess bestowed by Satan himself, the London (Ontario) three-piece rips over thirteen psychobilly sermons from the book of Demons, Bourbon and the Walking Dead. Like most psychobilly there's not much foot room for changing gears, but dammit if there ain't something about that doghouse bass and the way Hooch Parkins shakes loose his mousse that keeps us lining up for the ride. In Hooch's own words "Put that in your crotch 'n' rub it!" **TD** ⁂⁂⁂⁂



SKINLESS **Metal**
Trample The Weak, Hurdle The Dead
RELAPSE

Despite pushing their breed of beefy, detuned death metal – imagine a more snide *Clockwork Orange* take on Morgoth's fiery bottom-end driven growl – for almost fifteen years, New York's Skinless have still got it. This latest effort steps slightly away from the goofy gorecore and tunes about licking dead baby skulls, preferring realistically brutal imagery (e.g. artwork featuring a blood-splattered shotgun being presumably shoved into some unfortunate's mouth) found on tracks such as A Unilateral Disgust and Spoils Of The Sycophant. A few science fiction-inspired songs such as Deviation Will Not Be Tolerated also sneak in here and there, creating eight cuts uniting ultra-violent music and messages that could be Skinless' best to date. **KC** ⁂⁂



THE VINCENT BLACK SNADOW **Pop**
Fears in the Water
BoooGMusic

The Vincent Black Shadow are an inky concoction of 1940s cabaret, Blondie-style new wave, and hook-filled rock 'n' roll, all sexed up in an unlikely goth-soaked No Doubt sort of way. This Vancouver-based quintet takes black-humoured stabs at society's current fixations, including antidepressants and plastic surgery, while penning the odd murder-love ballad (Don't Go Soft) and an ode to personal phobias (the title track). Crooner Cassandra Ford's pipes are unbelievably powerful and totally mesmerizing, as she belts out wonderfully swanky numbers that are as memorable as they are unique. Although it seemingly runs out of steam halfway through, there's enough catchy material and raw talent on *Fears in the Water* to seduce your black heart for a spell or two. **AVL** ⁂⁂⁂



AUDIO DROME



The Audio Drome presents a look back at Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony Number Fourteen, quite possibly the darkest composition to come out of post-Stalin Russia.

THE ATHEIST'S REQUIEM

BY JOHN W. BOWEN



"Death isn't a beginning, it's the real end. There will be nothing afterwards – nothing." This was the way composer Dmitri Shostakovich (1906 – 1975) described the thesis of his Fourteenth Symphony to his biographer Solomon Volkov. While his music often shows a gift for wry humour and occasionally a tenderness that rivals Brahms and Schubert, Shostakovich – one of the most influential composers of the 20th century and an international superstar in his own lifetime – remains best known for powerful, eloquent and uncompromising soundscapes of anger, abject terror and utter despair.

He's probably the most frequently quoted composer in modern action/thriller and horror film scores, including the first two *Alien* films (Jerry Goldsmith and James Horner, respectively), and David Lynch has been known to play his music on set during rehearsals. However, it's important to establish that this was not your typical self-styled, self-absorbed tortured artiste (Mahler, anyone?); like most artists who laboured in the shadow of Josef Stalin, Shostakovich needs to be heard in the proper context.

By the time of Stalin's death in 1953, the 46-year-old composer was a chain-smoking, alcoholic nervous wreck, plagued by stress-related health problems and old before his time. Like Sergei Prokofiev and scores of other composers, Shostakovich was routinely bullied by Stalin's regime. In 1934 his daring, innovative opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* – a kind of opera noir rife with murder, betrayal and a bit of sex – premiered to rapturous critical acclaim and box-office success at home and abroad, but the delayed official reaction came in 1936 when a claque of Kremlin lackeys lambasted the piece in the national media for its "formalist" tendencies (i.e. art for art's sake).

Soviet artists, after all, were supposed to be ciphers for communist dogma, trumpeting the ideals of the Glorious Revolution while turning a blind eye to the atrocities that were being committed daily in its name. Arrests and disappearances were common, and even during the "cultural thaw" following Stalin's death, a bad review could mean banishment to a gulag or worse for Soviet artists.

Idiomatically, Shostakovich's Fourteenth follows few conventions of symphonic form, having more in common with the orchestral song cycles of Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss. Eschewing the usual four-movement format, the piece is divided into eleven short episodes, sparsely scored for strings, percussion and two vocal soloists (soprano and bass). The text consists of poetry by Federico Garcia Lorca, Guillaume Apollinaire, Wilhelm Kuchelbeker and Rainer Maria Rilke, each depicting death as absolute and final, devoid of any reassurances of resurrection.

The opening movement, a setting of Garcia Lorca's De Profundis, creeps in on a soft, dead-slow adagio string motif. A sombre solo bass voice intones in Russian: A hundred ardent lovers/Fell into eternal sleep/Deep beneath the dry ground/Here a hundred crosses will be set/So that people will not forget them/One hundred lovers/Sleep forever. The deathly calm is broken by an eruptive string melody introducing Malaguena, also featuring text by Garcia Lorca.

Shostakovich often deployed grotesque parodies of Russian folk music; a love song or lullaby would become a funeral dirge, a festive folk dance would mutate into an agitated fugue of paranoia. Here he sets his blackly satirical sights on Spanish music, deploying castanets and plucked strings (simulating guitars) to evoke a frantic death dance in jagged, schizophrenic time signatures. In contrast, Apollinaire's The Suicide is a quiet lament, intertwining a simple soprano melody line with solo cello: Three lilies, three lilies, lilies three lie on my unmarked grave/Three lilies, whose freshness the cold wind wears away.

This movement – which treads very close to chamber music territory – marks something of a departure for a composer often associated with huge, densely constructed symphonies, although his fifteen String Quartets are considered by many to be his crowning achievement. Apollinaire's *At the Sante Jail* provides the text for the Fourteenth's longest movement, a meditation on the death of hope: "They stripped me naked when they brought me to prison/Struck by fate from around a corner/I am thrust down into darkness."

This was typical of the subterfuge Shostakovich often employed to clandestinely voice his contempt for oppressive Soviet authorities, decrying brutality and corruption in a foreign land while making a covert attack on Stalinist totalitarianism. In the final movement – Rilke's Conclusion – soprano and bass join together for only the third time in the entire piece: Death is immense/We belong to him/Of the laughing mouth/When we think we are in the midst of life/He dares to weep/In our midst.

Eschewing the grandeur and bombast of symphonic finales heard down the years from Beethoven to Tchaikovsky to Sibelius, Shostakovich opts instead for a few dying breaths, the musical equivalent of T.S. Eliot's "Not with a bang but a whimper."

History and mortality often conspire to provide their own macabre punch lines, as evidenced at the 1969 Leningrad premiere of the Fourteenth. One of the bureaucratic pit bulls who had terrorized Shostakovich and countless other artists during Stalin's reign was in attendance, and his reaction to the Fourteenth's unrelenting bleakness was so pronounced that he bolted from the concert hall midway through the performance and dropped dead of a heart attack on the street. Revenge, according to the Spanish, is a dish best served cold. As cold, perhaps, as a Russian winter.

PLAY DEAD

GRAPHICS PLAYABILITY SHIVERS

HIGHEST RATING IS THREE.

GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE



SCRATCHES

PC

Got Game Entertainment

Not since Eva Peron and the Falkland Islands War has something so scary come out of Buenos Aires, but the release of the horror-adventure game *Scratches*, from Argentinian company Nucleosys, is gonna change that.

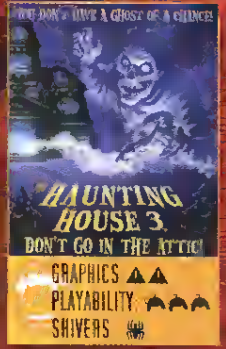
Players assume the role of Michael Arthate, a writer who has moved into a decrepit Victorian mansion and decides to investigate the mysterious murder/suicide of its previous inhabitants, the Blackwoods. Tha story unfolds as a point-and-click adventure game, replete with stunning 360-degree panoramic visuals of the manor and its surrounding grounds. Players explore such beautifully-rendered sites as a menacing family chapel, a dilapidated greenhouse and a claustrophobic family crypt housing decomposing bodies.

It's a dark, brooding game absolutely dripping with decay, made all the more atmospheric by an eerie soundtrack (created by a company fittingly called Cellar of Rats) that provides a sense of foreboding that is simply amazing. Because it's not an action title, don't expect to be blowing away zombies, though. Instead, you'll be solving puzzles and navigating the game's many twists, turns and obstacles, which increase in difficulty the further you progress.

Though there was never a time when I was jumping out of my seat while playing, there were many instances when the unsettling darkness and moody music had me right on the edge. Cry, gasp, whimper and scream for me, Argentina!







THE HAUNTING HOUSE 3: DON'T GO IN THE ATTIC!

Board Game

Twilight Creations Inc.

Back in *RM#41* I reviewed a clever board game called *The Haunting House* in which players try to escape from a house where the exit door is constantly moving around. In 2004 Twilight Creations released an expansion to the game called *The Second Story* and now they've released the third installment, which takes players into the uncharted expanse of the attic.

Meant to be played with the other two titles, *HH3* is a fun addition that comes with sixteen new mapping tiles, twelve new game cards and six transparent "ghost" pawns. These new pawns are utilized when your character dies, so instead of leaving the game you can now continue to play and even win if you're able to get up into the attic where you'll spend eternity haunting it from a dark dreary corner. And honestly, what more could a *Rue Morgue* ghoulie want?



RAMPAGE: TOTAL DESTRUCTION

PS2, GameCube

Midway

In 1986 a video arcade game called *Rampage* had teenagers putting down their Rubik's Cubes and picking up joysticks to take on the roles of giant monsters battling each other and destroying cities around the world. Now, Gaorge the gorilla, Lizzie the lizard and Ralph the werewolf are back, along with 27 other creatures, to smash buildings, SWAT teams and each other.

Given that the designers had two decades to come up with new gimmicks, this should be a great game, but the much-touted fully destructible 3-D environments are not as easy to navigate as in previous outings, and though the visuals are nice and clean, the sound is repetitive and game play quickly becomes boring, especially in single-player mode. Even with its shortcomings, though, you'll remember just how much fun it was to be able to toss a tank at your best fiend, er,

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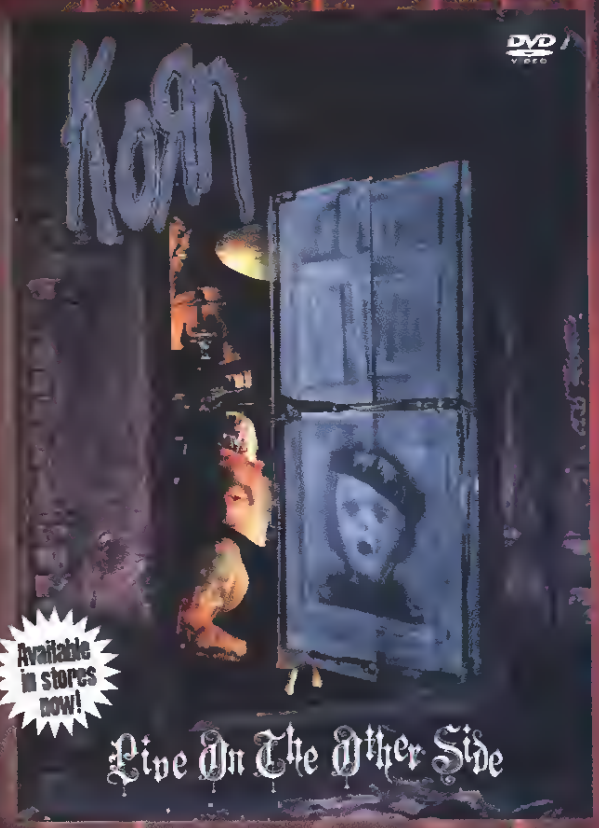
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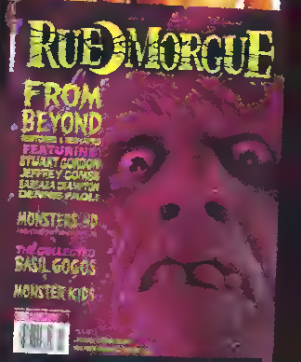
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Classic Cut

Presents

THE BLOODY BROOD



Canada - 1958
Directed by Julian Roffman
Starring Peter Falk, Jack Betts and Barbara Lord

Death – it's the ultimate kick, baby! Though little-seen today, the gruesome beatnik thriller *The Bloody Brood* (available through oldies.com) was one of the first Canadian-made flicks of its kind – an unapologetic exploitation picture that overdosed on cheap shock, lurid melodrama and furious bongo solos. Deemed too grisly for delicate Hollywood sensibilities in 1958, it overcame both the censor's scissors and spotty distribution to lay the groundwork for Canada's soon-to-be-booming horror industry.

Shot by producer/director Julian Roffman for a penny-pinching $80,000 in a small studio just north of Toronto, *The Bloody Brood* presented a Canadian twist on Leopold and Loeb's unprovoked slaying of a teen in the 1920s. Peter Falk, in his first starring role, is brilliantly malicious in the film as Nico, a two-bit mobster who keeps an entourage of coffee-house beatniks hanging on his every word. While the other part-time malcontents are engaged with art and poetry, Nico prefers to wax philosophical about murder being the "last great challenge to the creative mind", and gleefully watches an elderly heart attack victim in the final throes of death.

One night at a swank party, Nico puts theory into practice as he slips a hamburger laced with finely-ground glass to a messenger boy. When the police come up empty-handed in solving the senseless murder, the messenger's brother Cliff (Betts) investigates, and in a Hamlet-inspired twist, plans to out the killer by having one of the beats recite a finger-snapping poem about a deadly glass-burger.



The Bloody Brood was shot the same year as the beatnik horror farce *A Bucket of Blood*, but this isn't some Roger Corman campfest, Roffman infuses his debut feature with a chilling warning of how a psychopath might be indulged by a hedonistic subculture's pursuit of thrills. Unlike most comparable American beatnik flicks, it's fascinating to see Roffman treat these hep cats as real people rather than laughable, goatee-sporting caricatures. Though the hard-working Cliff is at first ostracized by the beat crowd as a square, it soon becomes obvious that it's Nico who doesn't fit in, a parasite who cloaks himself in an outsider lifestyle to flaunt his unhealthy obsession with death.

Roffman, who had cut his teeth directing stoic documentaries for the National Film Board, wasn't entirely comfortable with his new role as Canada's commercial cinema flag-bearer, but you wouldn't know it from this entertaining, well-shot production. It's not easy to evoke atmosphere in e poorly-lit, cramped studio setting, but accomplished German cinematographer Eugen Schüfftan, who later filmed Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (1959), works overtime to fill Nico's world with striking, shadowy interiors and memorable shots of macabre artwork in the beatnik's ramshackle coffee shop.

But even impressive camera work couldn't keep the groundbreaking film out of trouble. Made with the intention of selling it off to the highest bidding American distributor, *The Bloody Brood* ran into problems with the MPAA, who objected to the depiction of murder in the film. The censorship woes were enough to keep the film out of distribution for over a year, with big Hollywood studios unwilling to take a chance on Roffman's controversial shocker.

Eventually it was picked up by a tiny company called Sutton Pictures, before being quickly retired to the second half of a double bill by drive-in outfit Allied Artists, an unfortunate fate assured by the complete removal of the much-anticipated burger-eating scene in order to satisfy stuffy censors. Even today, prints of the film awkwardly jump from Nico inviting the messenger in for a bite to eat to the kid's dying phone call to Cliff – glaring evidence of Hollywood code tampering.

Despite its checkered history, *The Bloody Brood* was still the first Canadian feature film to secure distribution of any kind in almost twenty years, a success that led Roffman to direct his second and final film, 1961's infamous 3-D spookshow *The Mask*. By the time that Roffman returned to showbiz in the 1970s, producing the Montreal-set *The Hooker Cult Murders* (1973) and *The Glove* (1979), directors like Bob Clark, Ivan Reitman and David Cronenberg were treading boldly in Roffman's trailblazing path, picking up where he left off as they defined Canadian horror cinema as a unique and identifiable genre. As one of Canade's pioneering B-movies, however, *The Bloody Brood* remains strictly thrillsville, daddy-o, a wild ride through Canada's forgotten beatnik scene.

Paul Corupe

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